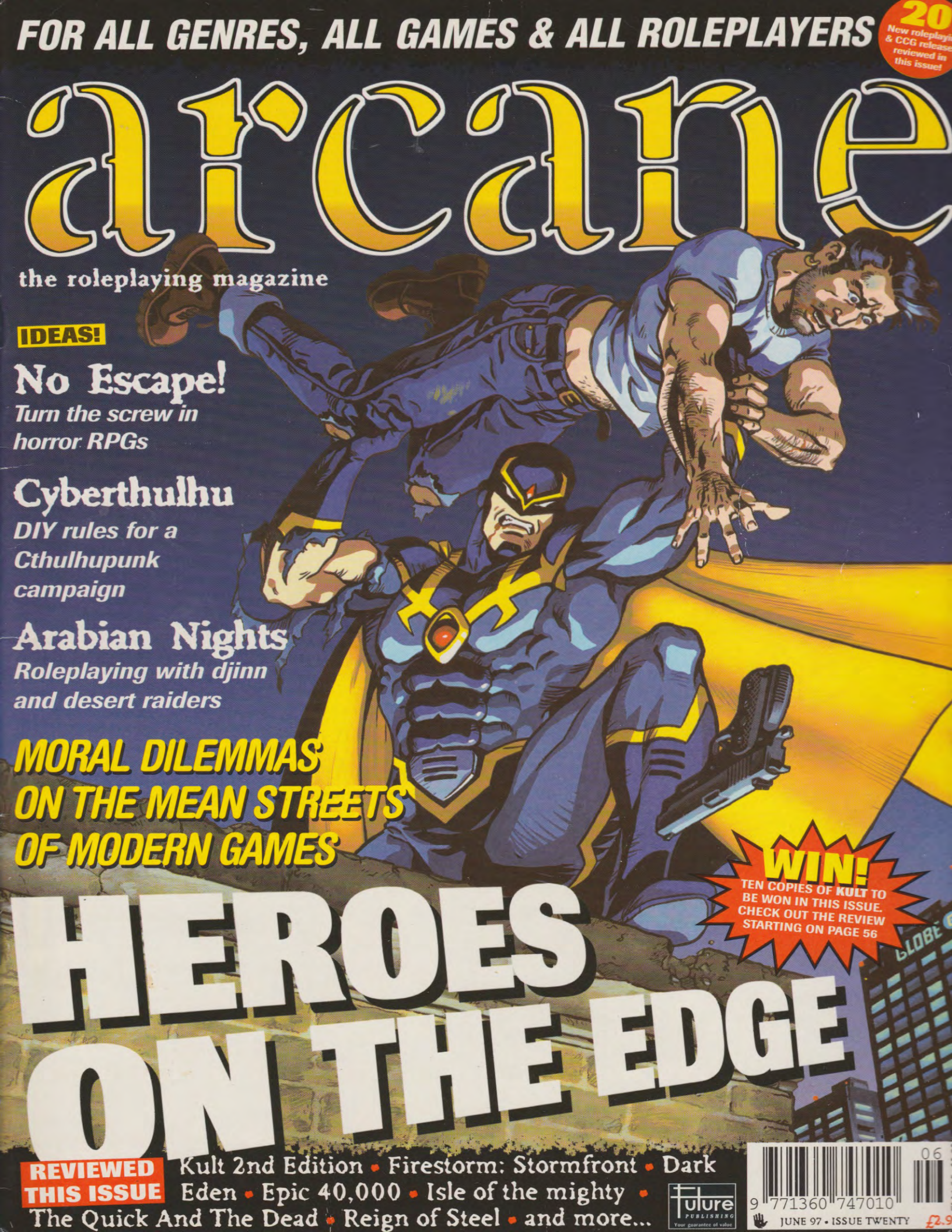
FOR ALL GENRES, ALL GAMES & ALL ROLEPLAYERS

20 New roleplaying & CCG releases reviewed in this issue!

arcane

the roleplaying magazine



IDEAS!

No Escape!
Turn the screw in horror RPGs

Cyberthulhu
DIY rules for a Cthulhupunk campaign

Arabian Nights
Roleplaying with djinn and desert raiders

MORAL DILEMMAS ON THE MEAN STREETS OF MODERN GAMES

HEROES ON THE EDGE

WIN!
TEN COPIES OF KULT TO BE WON IN THIS ISSUE. CHECK OUT THE REVIEW STARTING ON PAGE 56

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE
Kult 2nd Edition • Firestorm: Stormfront • Dark Eden • Epic 40,000 • Isle of the mighty • The Quick And The Dead • Reign of Steel • and more...

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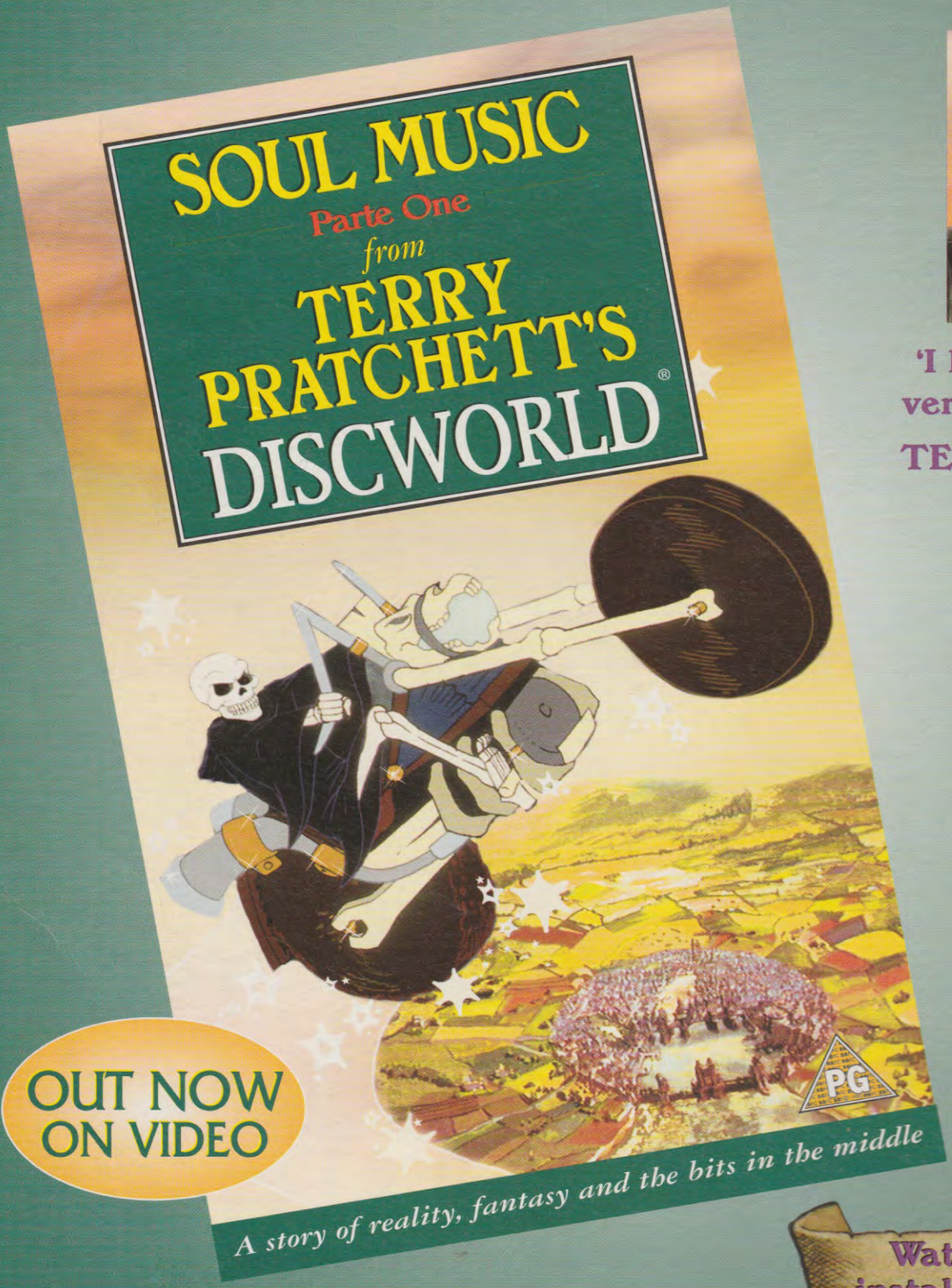

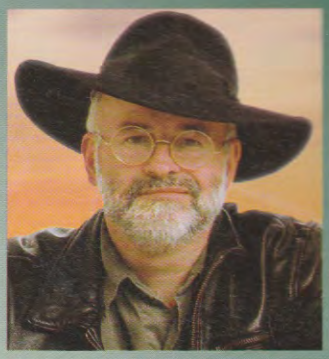

'I love the animated version of Soul Music'
TERRY PRATCHETT

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This year's biggest sequel: The full amazing details, the first awesome screenshots!

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PlayStation first! Get an exclusive look at Core's PSX scrolling scrap-fest!

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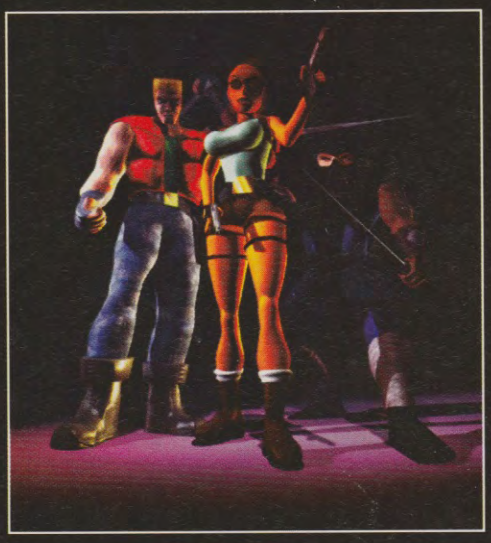

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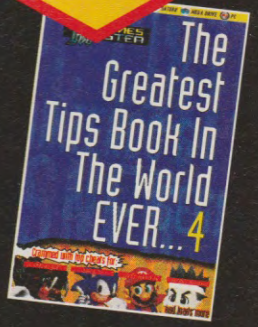

Read this month's GamesMaster if you want to go exclusively behind the scenes at Derby's Core Design. It really is that simple.

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Issue 56 – Out Now

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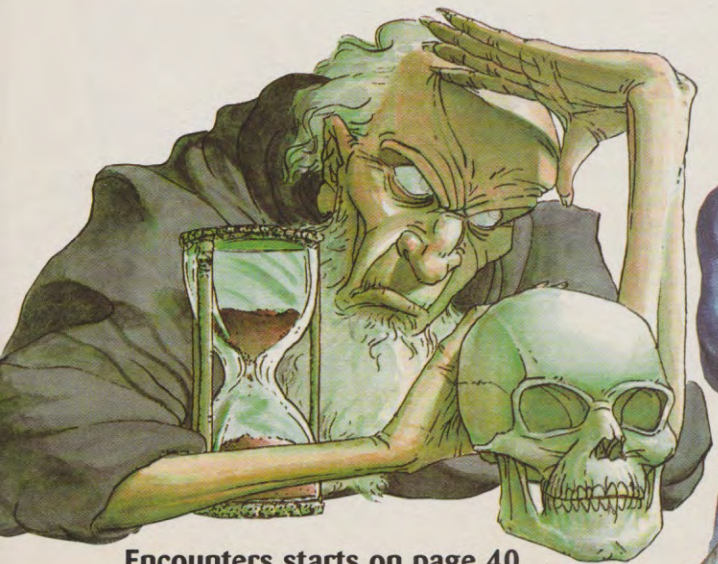

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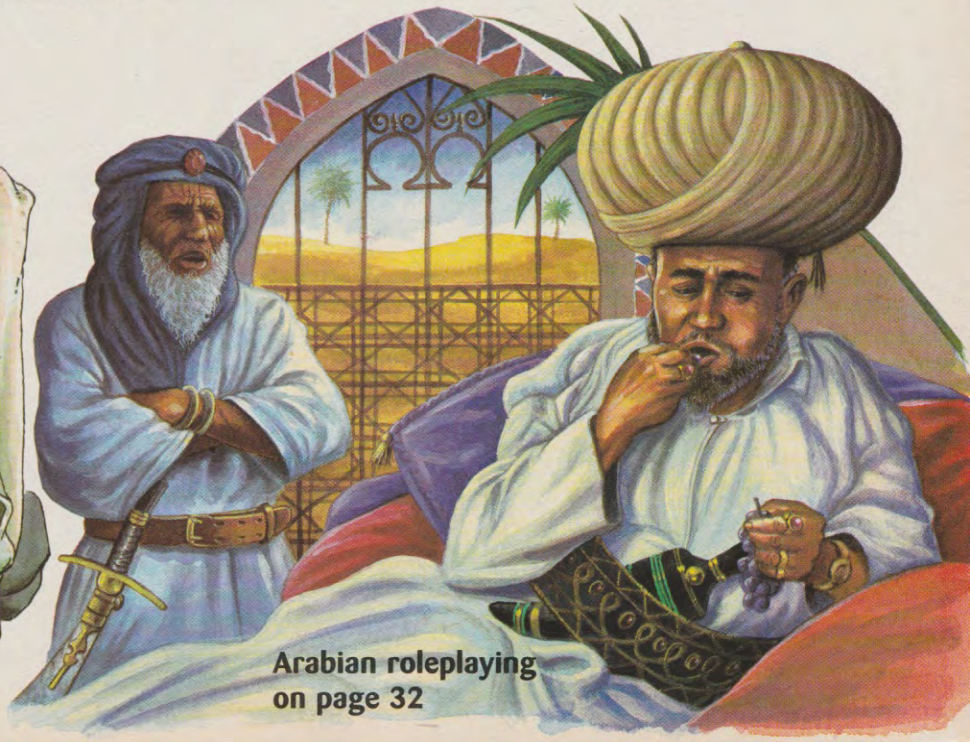

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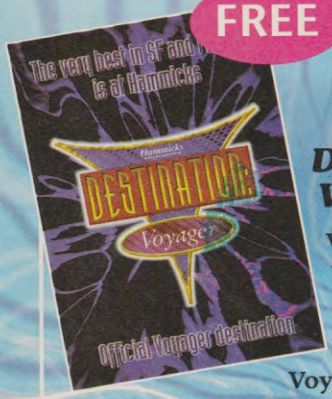

Destination: Voyager

Voyager have got together with Hammicks Bookshops to create Destination:Voyager. Hammicks branches keep a huge range of Voyager titles in stock and, to launch Destination:Voyager we've collected together excerpts from new Voyager titles into a FREE book available exclusively at Hammicks. With extracts including Robin Hobb's *Assassin's Quest, Rage of a Demon King* by Raymond E Feist and a complete Colin Greenland short story from his collection *The Plenty Principle*, demand is sure to be high, so get down to your nearest Hammicks branch from mid-April to secure your copy.

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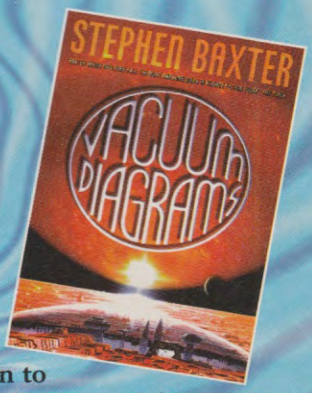

VACUUM DIAGRAMS Stephen Baxter

Stephen Baxter, the award-winning author of *The Time Ships* and *Voyage*, makes a welcome return to the future: to his dazzling world of alien occupation, exotic matter, time travel, bizarre weaponry and unforgettable characters. Above all, it's the world of the fabulous Xeelee, owners of the universe, the greatest and most mysterious of all aliens, the ultimate sentient beings. As the *New Scientist* has said of Baxter's work: 'The reaction is that which C.S. Lewis referred to when he described science fiction as the only genuine consciousness-expanding drug'!

Available 24 April £16.99

THE WITCHING HOUR John Pritchard

Sister Rachel Young is getting to grips with life again, a year after her husband died in a tragic road crash. But the uneasy truce with her past is about to erupt in a chaos of supernatural violence. The past isn't dead — it's been buried alive.

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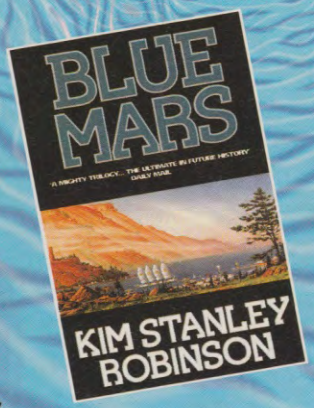

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The final instalment of the multi-award-winning Mars trilogy. Although Mars and Earth are politically independent, they are also inevitably intertwined. Earth has grown too much. Chronic overpopulation, bitter nationalism, scarce resources: to too many Terrans, Mars is a mocking utopia. A dream to live for, fight for, perhaps even die for...

Available 7 April £6.99

Log on this month for: an interview with Kim Stanley Robinson, award-winning author of the Mars trilogy; an exclusive extract of Stephen Baxter's *Vacuum Diagrams* and the chance to sample some of John Pritchard's *The Witching Hour*. Plus up-to-the-minute news, reviews and the chance to give your opinions.

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This issue would have been impossible without... **that new CD player**
This issue would have been a lot easier without... **sleep**

Be good NOW

Forget which side you're on and you may as well forget the game.

Morality. It's a slippery fish and no mistake. I mean, if you had a time machine and a gun, would you travel back several decades and shoot Hitler? Sure you would. But what if you were a lousy shot, and might hit a few bystanders? Would you try anyway? It's the kind of argument that bats backwards and forwards endlessly through the Golden Virginia smoke of philosophy seminar rooms.

The thing is, you don't know. It's hypothetical. If you see a film about something like this, or read a book about it, the ramifications hit home harder. The choice becomes clearer. Roleplaying games take this a stage further, however.

I was once refereeing a game of *Golden Heroes* where one of the players was – after some pleading – playing a character called 'Ex-terminator'. Naturally, he was a big Arnie fan. He had the motorbike. The silicon brain. The indomitable strength. The leather jacket. A pump action shotgun. Mirror shades. The works. He was in heaven.

Until, that is, he started going through the phone book to pay a visit on someone: a politician who would, in his own future and Ex-terminator's past, approve research into plague bombs that would decimate the world. He got the wrong guy first time. Just a businessman in a restaurant, as he later found out. He was crestfallen.

On the one hand, that's good. It showed that he didn't really think that blasting innocent people with shotguns was cool. But it also showed a couple of other things: that there are no pat answers to tricky moral dilemmas – you wouldn't know whether you'd shoot a possible plague bomb builder, or Adolf Hitler, unless your finger was on the trigger. And you certainly wouldn't know how you'd feel afterwards.

It also showed that what works on the big screen doesn't always work in a roleplaying game. With a book or film, you're a member of the audience. In a roleplaying game you're the actor, looking out of the protagonist's eyes.

Different points of view radically change the nature of a story – whether in a film or in a game. The player of Ex-terminator wasn't *watching* a muscly bloke gunning a big motorbike and generally being cool and indomitable; he was *looking* down the sights of a gun at an innocent bystander. It wasn't, ultimately, the character he expected.

It's possible he could have humanised the character (the mushy 'Terminators have feelings too' routine). But he didn't play it again. I suppose he didn't really want to be an emotionless agent of destruction, when it came right down to it.

I think that's the right attitude. What separates PCs from bad guy NPCs, in any genre, is a spark of heroism or decency. This is especially the case in modern, street-level games, where morality is less distinct and harder to define.

Inside even the most brooding, blood-thirsty gothic Vampire, there needs to be just a little bit of the four-colour superhero trying to get out.

And that's sort of what our lead article is all about. Let me know what you think.

Dan Joyce, Editor

"The Arnie-clone wasn't watching a muscly bloke being cool and indomitable; he was looking down the sights of a gun at an innocent bystander. It wasn't what he expected."

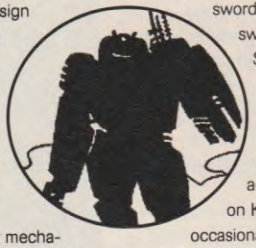
GURPS Galore

More supplements for Steve Jackson's universal roleplaying system.

The finely tuned and seemingly unstoppable machine of *GURPS* supplement production continues apace at Steve Jackson Games, with two more new books due soon, and several more scheduled for the release over the summer.

First comes the long-awaited *GURPS Mecha*, which promises to cover every aspect of anime-style fighting machines, power armour, and robotic walkers. There'll be a complete, simple to use design system together with a range of more complex options dealing with mecha that can transform or combine with each other, as well as psionic, energy-based, and steam-punk mecha.

In addition, *GURPS Mecha* will contain advice and notes on creating characters for mecha-based campaigns, using mecha in different styles of game, and even a complete campaign setting, *Cybermech Damocles*. Top this off with a section of new combat rules designed to simulate the cinematic style of anime mecha combat, and it looks like *GURPS Mecha* could be one of the best new *GURPS* books in some time.



After that comes *GURPS Planet Krishna*, based on the setting of many of L. Sprague de Camp's science fiction novels. If you haven't come across it before, Krishna is a world inhabited by a race of green-skinned creatures very similar to humans. The setting combines high drama space opera with the realism of hard science fiction, together with a healthy does of humour

One of the most interesting aspects of the setting is the lack of technology – the import of high technology items is banned, and so players won't have access to the usual array of science fiction toys. Instead they'll have to rely on their wits and their swords, making the setting ideal for swashbuckling high adventure. Steve Jackson promise that the book will remain true to the source novels, but contain a wealth of background information and advice on running campaigns on Krishna or using it as an occasional location in another science fiction campaign.

Keep 'em peeled for full reviews of *GURPS Mecha* and *GURPS Planet Krishna* in the next couple of issues of arcane, together with more news about the forthcoming *GURPS Ultra-Tech 2* and *GURPS Black Ops*.

Rifts: The New West

Two new books from Palladium on the way.

Palladium Books is set to continue detailing the seemingly endless setting of Rifts roleplaying system in two new World Books, both dealing with the vast wilderness of the New West.

World Book 14: New West will cover this dangerous area is detail. Avoided by the forces of the Coalition, the American west has become a lawless no-man's land, home to those humans and D-bees willing to risk its many dangers. The *New West* book will feature complete information about the entire area, including its geography, details of the important towns and characters that live there, the society that has evolved in them, and the many deadly creatures that live in the wastes.

There'll also be a variety of new character classes – including the Gunslinger, Wired Gunslinger, Psi-Slinger, Cowboy, and Saddle Tramp – and details of Techno-Wizard magic that can turn simple guns into incredibly powerful weapons of destruction, together with new equipment and gear.

While *New West* concentrates on the human settlers of the area, *World Book 15: Spirit West* will take a longer look at the Native Americans who call the west their home. The book will feature full details on the ancient Indian gods and spirits that have returned to the Earth, rules for Indian magic – including totems and fetishes – new Indian character classes like the Totem Warrior and Shaman, complete background information on the various Indian nations, and – you guessed it – more guns, weapons, and other high-tech toys.

Both *Rifts World Book 14: New West* and *Rifts World Book 15: Spirit West* are due to be released by Palladium in June. keep an eye out for full reviews of both books in coming issues of arcane.

DIGITAL DICE GIVEAWAY!

We've got 1,000 playable demos of the Dragon Dice computer game to give away!

Computer games publisher Interplay is currently working on several new PC games based on the many games of TSR. The first to be released will be the computer version of the successful *Dragon Dice* collectable dice game.

The game will feature five different races, each with a wide variety of warriors and magicians that players can choose between when designing their armies, an animated tutorial that will teach you how to play, superb graphics and a tough, clever computer opponent.

Thanks to the nice folks at Interplay, we've got no fewer than 1,000 playable demos of the *Dragon Dice* game to give away to you, our faithful readers. All you have to do to get a shiny new CD winging its way through the post is send us a postcard with your name and address on it, clearly marked 'Mmmm.... Dragon Dice Demo'. Send them to us at the usual arcane address – arcane, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, Avon, BA1 2BW – and we'll see that a copy of the demo drops through your post box in return.

EMAILE's Pox a Month
Sat 7th 10.30am–5pm (doors open 10am)
Static Games, Argyle Market, 28 Argyle Street, Glasgow.
Duelists' Convocation
Sanctioned *Magic* Tournament.
Classic Restricted type/Swiss system. Full deck listing (including sideboards) required. Deck resets before matches also required. 32 players. £3
Contact: Stuart Gosden, EMAILE, 7/4 Magdalene Gardens, Edinburgh, Lothian EH15 3DG **0131 467 4540**

Birmingham Magic
Sun 15th 12.30pm–7pm (doors open 12pm)
King George V pub, Bristol Road South, Longbridge, Birmingham.
Duelists' Convocation
Sanctioned *Magic* Tournament.
Standard type/Swiss system. Bar on site. 72 players. £3
Contact: Simeon Jones, 58 Trescott Road, Northfield, Birmingham B31 5QA **0121 608 6768 simjon@waverider.co.uk http://www.waverider.co.uk/~simjon/**

Dundee Magic
Sun 15th 1pm–10pm (doors open 12.30pm)
Deacon Brodie's Tavern, Ward Road, Dundee.
Duelists' Convocation
Sanctioned *Magic* Tournament.
Standard type/Swiss system. No under 14s. 64 players. £3
Contact: Silas Bath, 1st Floor Flat, 20 Nelson Street, Dundee DD1 2PU **01382 204990**

Nottingham Magic
Sat 21st 11am–6pm (doors open 10.30am)
Thurland Hall, Pelham Street, Nottingham.
Duelists' Convocation
Sanctioned *Magic* Tournament.
Standard type/Swiss system. 40 players. £2.
Contact Rachel Sisson, 54 Park Avenue, Kimberley, Notts NG16 2PW **0115 938 3918**

EMAILE Edinburgh Tournament
Sun 29th 1pm–8pm (doors open 12.30am)
Tron Ceilidh House, Hunter Square, Edinburgh
Duelists' Convocation
Sanctioned *Magic* Tournament.
Standard type/Swiss system. 5 minutes from Waverley station. 64 players. £3.
Contact Stuart Gosden, EMAILE, 7/4 Magdalene Gardens, Edinburgh, Lothian EH15 3DG **0131 467 4540**

Swindon & District 10
Sun 29th 10.45am–9pm (doors open 10am)
Cricklade Town Hall, High Street, Cricklade, Swindon SN6 6AE
Duelists' Convocation
Sanctioned *Magic* Tournament.
Standard type/Swiss system. 96 players. £3.
Contact Martin Steed, 6 Goddard Avenue, Swindon SN1 4HR **01793 532939 martin.steed@trw.com**

Nottingham Magic
Mon 30th 7pm–11pm (doors open 6.30pm)
Thurland Hall, Pelham Street, Nottingham.
Duelists' Convocation
Sanctioned *Magic* Tournament.
Standard type/Swiss system. 10 minutes from train station, 5 minutes from bus station. 40 players. £2.
Contact: Rachel Sisson, 54 Park Avenue, Kimberley, Notts NG16 2PW **0115 938 3918**

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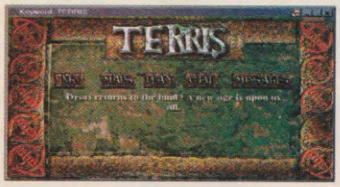
EMAILE's Pox a Month
Sat 2nd 10.30am–5pm (doors open 10am)
Static Games, address as before.
Duelists' Convocation
Sanctioned *Magic* Tournament.
System / details as before.Contact: Stuart Gosden, EMAILE, 7/4 Magdalene Gardens, Edinburgh, Lothian EH15 3DG **0131 467 4540**

New look Terris

America OnLine's best fantasy game gets even better.



Terris, the best fantasy roleplaying game available on America On-Line, has just has a major overhaul. The game's interface has been completely revamped, and now offers many new features to make playing the game even easier and more fun, including colour displays, on-line maps, and sound effects.

This face-lift has gone hand in hand with the constant evolution and growth of the rules system and world, making it an even better game all round. Terris is one of our favourite multi-player games here at arcane, and is one of the only ones to actively encourage team-work and roleplaying amongst its hundreds of players. If you thought that text-based adventure games were a dead-end, give *Terris* a try and see what you've been missing.

Thorns of the Lotus

Reports of Feng Shui's demise have been greatly exaggerated...

Despite some rumours that have been flying around recently, it appears that Daedalus Entertainment isn't about to close down, but has simply been one the move. The good news for fans of *Feng Shui*, the Hong Kong action movie roleplaying game (arcane 1) is that the next supplement for the game is due out soon.

Thorns of the Lotus is the first in a planned series of books, each dealing with one of the major factions in *Feng Shui's* Secret War. The supplement will take an in-depth look at the evil eunuch sorcerers of the *Eaters of the Lotus*, detailing their history, background, and objectives in the Secret War. In addition, there'll be full stats and roleplaying notes for many of the leaders and other important characters in the faction, and a whole host of adventure ideas. Look for a full review soon.

seymour

Who is this overweight 'crewsader'? And what does he want?

Nylon eye-ear ago – on thar 24th of organism to big pretzel – a manicled 'Yorick' from Hamster Heath wuz wotching Commie-Gen Kevin Day on thar late nite show 'Cyber Café' wayare he wuz disgusting thar football team Cowdenbeath Blue Brazils n udder things that yoocan follow on that Internet, n ayvery-thing was laaht n fluffy n joculating n fashonbly football orientayted... *until* – en ar quote:

"this izzn gona do mah im-midge much good, butt-ah also do some roleplaying..."

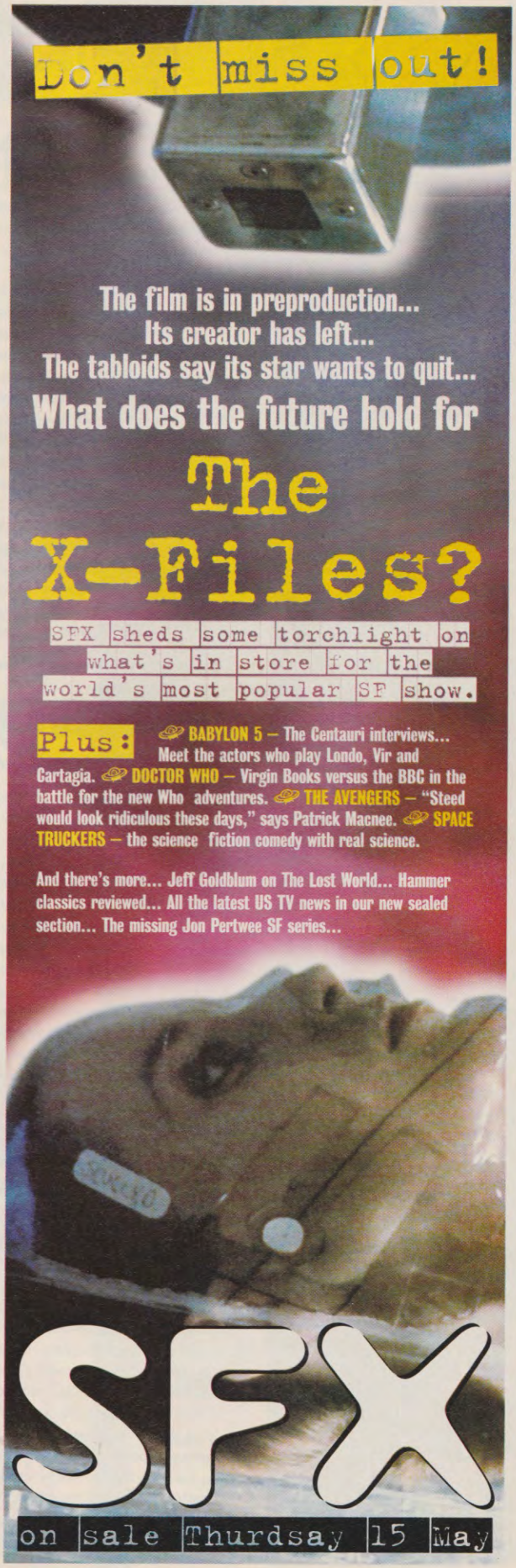
On thar telLINGvishun! Wayare young chillblanes could be exposed to this darkest deep-ravitee! (Had thay bin awake at 4 in thar moaning.)

Thayn – as if he haydn corrupted enough of ar chickens al-rayedy – this sayem mayan appeared again on Chewsday thar 27th on thar sho' 'Stand Up' wherein – as if traa-ing to exogamate his say-elf bah playfully sacherizing thar roleplaying fraternity – he did persecute certain elephants in thar orjans bah saying as how thay looked lahk roleplayers on account of they-ar duffle coats.

It further dees turbs me thayat this informayshun has only jes bin passed onto me from unnernith mah daysk and that Mister Day has all this tahm traying to bee funny about roleplaying when thiziz no layffin madder.

Bring dowen thigh mighdy Thunderbird frome thar skyer and RAIN Penzance upon thar weevil sinners that thay see thar Errol Flynn of thay-awares...

Write to Seymour at **arcane**, 30 Monmouth St, Bath BA1 2BW or email arcane@futurenet.co.uk and denounce your famous friends. Do not include your telephone number.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The X-Files?
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And there's more... Jeff Goldblum on The Lost World... Hammer classics reviewed... All the latest US TV news in our new sealed section... The missing Jon Pertwee SF series...
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Famous for 15 Minutes

Judy Matthews tells us of the gloriously sunny Devon afternoon of April 8th – all apple blossom, dry stone walls and buxom dairy cows and our correspondent idling in front of the television after a long day at college, mucking about and "waiting to be late for work that evening".

Normally, we'd expect people from that part of the world to be spending the springtime drinking cider and frolicking with the lickle baby lambs, but Judy's insatiable thirst for culture had made her draw the curtains against the sun to watch *Scooby Doo*.

"Scooby and Scrappy went to a Wizards and Warlocks convention, both wearing pointy wizard's hats and all the people got kidnapped. The only way to save them was to finish the game," Judy told us, before turning back to face the television screen, putting her knuckles up to her mouth and humming the theme tune while rocking backwards and forwards ever so slightly.

Despite the chicanerous machinations of the baddies however, it didn't take long for the gang to foil their dastardly plot – about ten minutes actually – and new boy Scrappy, to his immense delight, was promoted to Grand High Wizard, while Scooby got himself a Scooby snack and Judy gets an arcane T-shirt, which makes people come up to her in the street to ask where she got it and puts her at the very hub of the 'in crowd'. In Newton Abbot anyway.

Write to 15 minutes, arcane, 30 Monmouth St, Bath BA1 2BW or email arcane@futurenet.co.uk and tell us how you've been squandering the best years of your life.

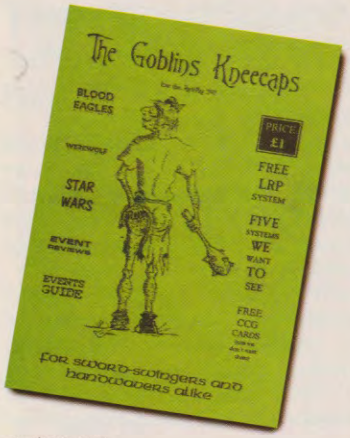
The Goblins Kneecaps

A new fanzine for live-action roleplayers

One of the best put-together fanzines we've seen in a while here at arcane, *The Goblins Kneecaps* comes from Tony Blews. The 'zine is aimed squarely at live-action roleplayers, and is intended to help LARP fans keep up to date with upcoming events, as well as providing reviews and thoughts about events in the Staffordshire area, and general LARP hints, tips, and advice.

Under the bright green cover of issue 1 can be found 28 A5 pages, with five pages of news, reviews of *The Lands Awakening* event and *Star Wars* Live Action Adventures, and seven features including the first part of a complete LARP system and a slightly curious article on the Viking practise of the Blood Eagle. Our copy also came with a free promo card for the *X-Files card* game, and a voucher for 50p off the price of a Werewolf LARP in Stafford.

In all, then, *The Goblins Kneecaps* is a neat little fanzine that has a lot of good stuff for LARPers, especially those living in and around Staffordshire. Tony is planning to produce the zine on a bi-monthly basis, and the price is very reasonable at £1 including



postage, or a year's supply of six issues for £5. For more information, e-mail or write to Tony Blews at:

130 Tixall Road
Stafford
ST16 3UD
kneecaps@netlrp.uk.com

In Nomine gets heavy

Hardback versions of Steve Jackson Games' latest RPG on the way

Steve Jackson Games is to release two limited edition hardback versions of the *In Nomine* roleplaying game (arcane 18).

The deluxe editions of the rules will be available in angelic white as pictured here, or demonic black. Both versions feature metallic red titles and the *In Nomine* crucifix (inverted on the demonic version of the book, of course).

Internally the books are identical to the softcover versions already available. They certainly look very pretty, though, and our exhaustive book-destruction tests show that the hardcovers are certainly going to put up with continued use a lot more effectively – the softcover suffers from a tendency to lose its pages after a while.

The angelic version does have a tendency to mark, however. The hardcover editions of *In Nomine* should be available by the time you read this, priced at around £19.95.

Magic Patch

New update released for Magic: The Gathering CD-ROM game

Software publisher MicroProse has released an update for the official *Magic: The Gathering* computer game.

As well as fixing a variety of bugs and mistakes in version 1.0 of the game, the update also improves the speed of the computer opponent, stops it making some of the mistakes it was prone to, such as casting multiple enchantments on the same target (multiple Flight spells, for example), and improves its use of certain critical cards. Also, after some consultation with Wizards of the Coast, some of the game's rules interpretations have been updated to match the most current official rulings.

The version 1.1 update can be downloaded from the World Wide Web sites of Wizards of the Coast and MicroProse at:

http://www.wizards.com
http://www.microprose.com/

Gamers without internet access can get hold of the patch direct from MicroProse - see the technical support information that came with the game for the relevant contact details.

Twilight Lands

3D multiplayer roleplaying over the internet

Internet games company E-On is to launch a new multiplayer fantasy roleplaying game with an innovative 3D interface that promises to be both smooth and highly detailed.

Players will be able to create a character, selecting from a range of character classes and appearances, then enter the world of the game. E-On are promising a vibrant, exciting game world full of quests to complete and monsters to defeat that will evolve as new areas and quests are added.

It's not clear yet exactly how much the game will encourage roleplaying and social interaction amongst its players, although there will be a clan structure that will allow gamers with similar interests to band together to help each other out.

Anyone interested in *Twilight Lands* can find more information about the game at E-On's World Wide Web site:

http://www.e-on.com

WIN A copy of Kult 2nd Edition

We've got 10 copies of this controversial horror roleplaying game to give away!

Kult, the notorius horror roleplaying game, has returned in a brand new second edition that's even better than the original (see page 56 for our full review of the game). Although the game may not be to everyone's tastes, if you're looking for a game with a harder, more mature edge than the average horror roleplaying system, *Kult: Second Edition* should definitely be on your shopping list.

Thanks to the nice folks at Metropolis, though, ten lucky readers of arcane won't have to pay a penny for the game, as we've got exactly that many copies to give away. All you have to do to win one is send us the answer to the question below on a postcard or via e-mail. If you're name is pulled out of the disturbing receptacle of our choice, a copy of the game will wing its way through the dimension of terror that is the British postal system and arrive on your doorstep with an ominous thump just when you weren't expecting it...

Q In Kult, reality as we know it is an illusion, created by a vastly powerful being called...

A. Da Boss **B.** The Demiurge **C.** Twibbly

Mark your entry "Reality may be an illusion, but dropping a brick on your foot still hurts" and send or e-mail them them to...

arcane Future Publishing Ltd 30 Monmouth Street Bath. BA1 2BW
arcane@futurenet.co.uk

REALITY IS AN ILLUSION, BUT OUR RULES ARE VERY REAL

1. All entries must reach the arcane office by July 4 in the framework of linear time used by mortals.
2. Employees of Future Publishing and Metropolis Games are already fully aware of the futile and illusory nature of time and space (working in publishing does that to you), and so have no need to enter.
3. Sending more than one entry will really annoy our letter opener-in-chief and his dark minions. So don't do it.
4. The powers of the editor have been granted by dark and mysterious beings beyond the ken of mere mortals – so his decision is as final as something that's very, very final indeed.
5. Only over 18s can enter – and we might ask you to prove it.

ARRRGH! NO! GREMLINS!

It's with a heavy and apologetic heart that we at arcane must admit to lowering our vigilance while finishing the last issue of arcane. Our backs were only turned for a moment, but that was all the crack commando team of publishing gremlins under the leadership of the psychotic 'Typo' needed.

The result was that last issue's competition prizes were incorrectly credited to Gold Rush Games, instead of the wonderful people at R Talsorian who actually supplied the copies of *Champions: The New Millennium*, and that Hobbygames was not credited for supplying us with review copies of the new releases from *Iron Crown Enterprises*.

We're very sorry about these mistakes, and would like to assure everyone that a new system of fully automated, gremlin-seeking miniguns is being set up even as you read this.

Hobbygames can be contacted on 01903 730998, or at hobbyuk@pavilion.co.uk

next month in arcane

Badfellas

Believable fantasy bad guys don't dress alike in hooded robes with skull motifs. They're smart, they're individualistic and they're a bundle of trouble for your players. John Tynes shows you how to create and use villains with black ambitions and blacker hearts. Bwa-hah-hah-hah-har!

The Orient Expressed

Mandarins with moustaches, paddy fields and blue-and-white plates spring to mind when you mention China. But what else? Seems we're pretty ignorant when it comes to the 'inscrutable' East. Paul Mason paints a fuller picture of China for GM's who want to use its culture.

ENCOUNTER: SMAUG BASE!

Clouds of chlorine gas swirl around the backwater survey station on a small, supposedly uninhabited planet. And the atmosphere inside the station isn't exactly balmy either. Drop down the gravity well and find out why. With stats for Traveller and Star Wars.

Plus

Werewolf special: four-page review of Werewolf: The Wild West, plus an interview with the designers; How to run mystery plots successfully; Nicking ideas from Jules Verne; How to adapt the D6 System to the world of Glorantha; plus a couple of Magic articles and pages and pages of reviews and news.

arcane 21 will be on sale on Friday 20th June

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Wizards & Dungeons

another first for arcane - an interactive opinion column...

ANDREW RILSTONE

Andrew is the editor of *Interactive Fantasy*, the journal of roleplaying and story-making systems, and is also a regular contributor to arcane.

Andrew Rilstone has just read on the Information Super Highway that Wizards of the Coast (publishers of *Magic: The Gathering*) have bought out TSR (publishers of *Dungeons & Dragons*.) He has walked over to the typewriter to compose his column for arcane 19.

If you would like him to write a **negative** *column, go to paragraph 1.*
If you would like him to write a **positive** *column, go to paragraph 2.*
If you would like him to write a **neutral** *column, go to paragraph 3.*

Unfunny Joke
How many *D&D* players does it take to change a lightbulb?
A party of six: one tenth level character to do it; and five first level characters to share the experience points out among themselves.

Another Unfunny Joke
What's the difference between *Magic: the Gathering* and crack cocaine?
You can come off crack cocaine.

PARAGRAPH 1

TSR were the first roleplaying game company. They are the biggest RPG company. They pretty much invented RPGs. The fact that they have been bought out by the firm which has made millions by peddling glorified bubblegum cards is sadly emblematic of the state of our hobby.

In the last four or five years, fantasy gamers have been increasingly abandoning RPGs in favour of the shinier, easier, but ultimately less rewarding world of collectable card games.

Magic decks, *Magic* boosters and (worst of all!) Magic players have taken shelf space away from real RPGs in many games shops. Conventions which would once have been dominated by *Dungeons & Dragons* now have trestle tables full of spotty faced *Magic* addicts. The fact that Wizards of the Coast now actually owns *Dungeons & Dragons* looks, in retrospect like a piece of historical inevitability.

What will this enormous new power block - the two biggest games in the hands of one conglomerate - do to the hobby? Are they going to promote new and original gaming ideas, or merely look for ways of maximising their profit by selling people trading cards? Will smaller companies (the ones who come up with new, daring, original, exciting games) be able to compete?

What will become of *Dungeons & Dragons* itself? There's bound to be a new *D&D* trading card game, and let's face it, it could hardly be worse than *Spellfire*. But can we also expect a 4th Edition of *D&D* with, say, a spell system that you can only use if you buy lots of packets of overpriced cards?

And remember this. It is barely a year since WOTC cancelled their entire RPG line. The excellent *Everway* had only been out three months. The reprint of *Ars Magica* was killed before it was even published. Just how committed can a company who does that be to RPGs?

Can we be certain that, six months down the line, we will not read that WOTC are cancelling (they will say 'down-sizing' or even 'right-sizing') the unprofitable *D&D* RPG in order to concentrate on the more successful *D&D* trading card line?

"Who gives a hellhound's mouthwash whose pocket their copper pieces go to?"

PARAGRAPH 2

Even people who (like me) don't much care for trading card game have to admit that they have done a great deal of good for the role-playing industry.

It's kept many small shops in business. It's all very well to want to be able to pick up the latest supplement for *Skyrealms of Jorune*, but minority interest games don't pay a shop owner's rent. If not for a big money spinner like *Magic*, a lot of small shops might not exist, so its pretty daft to complain about the shelf-space given over to cards. (I wonder if arcane itself would exist if not for the cardgame boom?)

What's more, people are going into games-shops who never did so before. Sure, they are going in to buy *Magic*, to talk about *Magic*, even to play *Magic*, but there's always a chance that they'll see that copy of *Skyrealms of Jorune* or *Pendragon* on the shelf.

Now that the publishers of the Most Famous RPG in the World has joined forces with the publisher of the Most Famous Card Game in the World, this situation is bound to get better. Wizards will want to promote their new lines of products - and that means selling RPGs to card players.

For years, gamers have been lamenting the fact that RPGs are a minority interest hobby that hardly anyone has ever heard of. Now a new company is forming which might well have the clout to get RPGs into the mainstream. And what do we do?

We moan about it. I sometimes think that gamers simply begrudge success. They hate TSR; they hate Wizards; they hate Workshop: in order to be a true, ideologically pure RPG company, you have to lose money!

Well, I want my hobby to be successful, and I want as many people as possible to play in it. The Wizards-TSR alliance could be just the group to lead the new renaissance.

Shurely shome mistake?
The programme for the 1996 world SF con said that the publishers of *Magic: The Gathering* were 'Wizards of the *Cost*'.

PARAGRAPH 3

So one big American company has bought out another big American company. Am I really supposed to care?

D&D will still be *D&D* - complicated, bland, clichéd, out-of-date, no matter who owns it. *Magic* will still be *Magic* - complicated, gaudy, addictive, superficial - whatever other companies Wizards happen to own. If you like *D&D* books, by all means buy them. If you like *Magic* cards, buy them. But who gives a hellhound's mouthwash whose pocket your copper pieces end up in?

To listen to some gamers talk, you'd think that the merger heralded the imminent collapse of the whole role-playing industry. Well, even if it did, so what? We've all got the imagination to run good RPGs without new *Forgotten Realms* supplements to tell us how. Maybe we'd be better off without them.

We ought to get on with using our imaginations, running games, telling stories, and having fun - and stop pretending that what goes on in boardrooms in Lake Geneva makes the faintest difference to us grassroots gamers one way or the other.

Initial Results
Fans have spent many years wondering what TSR stands for. Popular suggestions have been 'They Sue Regularly' and 'Those Stupid Rulebooks'. (The real answer: 'Tactical Studies Rules' is far too boring to mention.)

Ready about!
There's a new sailing magazine in sight, and yachtsmen should prepare to change course. Dynamically designed, and written by people with a passion for sailing, Sailing Today will help you get the most out of your boat at the minimum cost.
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Please hug the roleplayer to your left

Are we too busy hurling the verbal at our comrades? **Jonathan Hicks** reckons that it's time for some solidarity.

WHAT MAKES A ROLEPLAYER want to sit around a table with a few friends and pretend to be someone or something who exists only in their imagination?

I mean, here we are being another person. Is it because our own lives are so dull? Have none of us got lives of our own?

Could it be that we are such weedy wimps that the stuff our characters do is a replacement for that which we believe we can never achieve ourselves? Or maybe it's because we're so full of ideas, we need to vent them. Sort of like a sink overflow.

Maybe we're sociable types who enjoy getting together with friends. Maybe we appreciate roleplaying for what it is – a game.

In the end, though, we are none and all of the above. Whatever, it's incredibly narrow-minded to junk roleplayers into one category, whether that's 'imaginative', 'sad'.

Ah, have I struck a chord yet? Plucked a few strings? Everybody's been lumped into one of those groups. I think we all know which group we are usually in when it comes to public perception. In the UK, at least, roleplaying ranks alongside trainspotting in terms of status.

And yet, if you think about it, if we applied the same rules to every hobby, sport or interest that came our way, most of the world would be sad, obsessed, imaginative, or whatever. Take football. I've played the game since I was 10 years old.

"It's incredibly narrow-minded to junk roleplayers into one category – whether that's 'imaginative' or 'sad.'"

But some people devote all of their free time to supporting their favourite team. Some players are national heroes, pop culture icons. Doesn't that strike you as a little childish, a wee bit obsessional, a tad, dare I say it, sad?

The reason why footie players and their fans aren't grouped as weirdoes is pretty obvious. Football is almost global religion, with a following numbered in millions. It's mainstream. Roleplaying ain't. And it probably ain't likely to be.

What's more, football is universally understood. Well, except for the offside rule, but that's beside the point. Everybody knows the idea behind it. Roleplaying is difficult to understand and just as tricky to explain. Ignorance, to beat a cliché to death, breeds contempt.

The more famous a hobby is, too, the more acceptable it is. Because loads of people play cricket, jog, or (gasp) do aerobics, it's kosher, unimpeachable.

The main reason for our hobby's image is that people don't understand it. There is no other reason.

So, you're thinking, we know all this already. we're brave, we can say, "I'm different, I'm off the mainstream and proud of it." We can be sublime, because we're doing something a bit fresher than Mr Smith, the man who washes his car every Sunday and works at a no-name job but still thinks he has the right to slag other people off, because their interests differ from his.

The reason I'm wiffling away, though, is that we need a bit of solidarity between gamers. We're so busy slagging each other off at the moment, we've got no time to defend ourselves from the bigots.

What's worse is that I'm not innocent in this. I gripe about other gamers who I think aren't playing the game properly, at other people's ideas and views on how the game should be played.

The reason I'm reeling all of this off is to create solidarity between gamers, which seems to be lacking at the moment. You've got people going on about the way others view games, others complaining about how their gender is portrayed, even others picking up on even the most innocent comments and taken them the wrong way and airing their own view.

What's so strange is that, after we've linked hands and defended our hobby, we set about the business of beating each other up verbally.

The more we have a go at each other, the more detached we become as a hobby genre. Maybe Andrew Rilstone is right. Maybe card games are going to be the death of roleplaying.

After all, there's only one way to play a card game, and you don't have to worry about being criticised for the way you do it.

NOT A CON Going to a games convention is a good way or reminding yourself that roleplaying is a decent-sized hobby, and that plenty of different people do it.

Richard Garfield has said that he'd like to see *Magic: The Gathering* gain the status and recognition of chess, since games – whether fantasy or not – are the mental analogue of sports. It might happen. It's popular. There's money it it. There are clear winners and losers...

ON THE SOAPBOX is your page – it's where we give you the opportunity to get something off your chest (as long as it's to do with the gaming industry, of course). The views expressed by you on this page aren't necessarily the views of arcane, or of the arcane editorial team. If you'd like to have your say, send in a piece of around 1,000 words long to: On the Soapbox, arcane, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. Or e-mail it to: arcane@futurenet.co.uk **What's more, if we print your Soapbox you'll win a year's free subscription to arcane. If you give us your address.**

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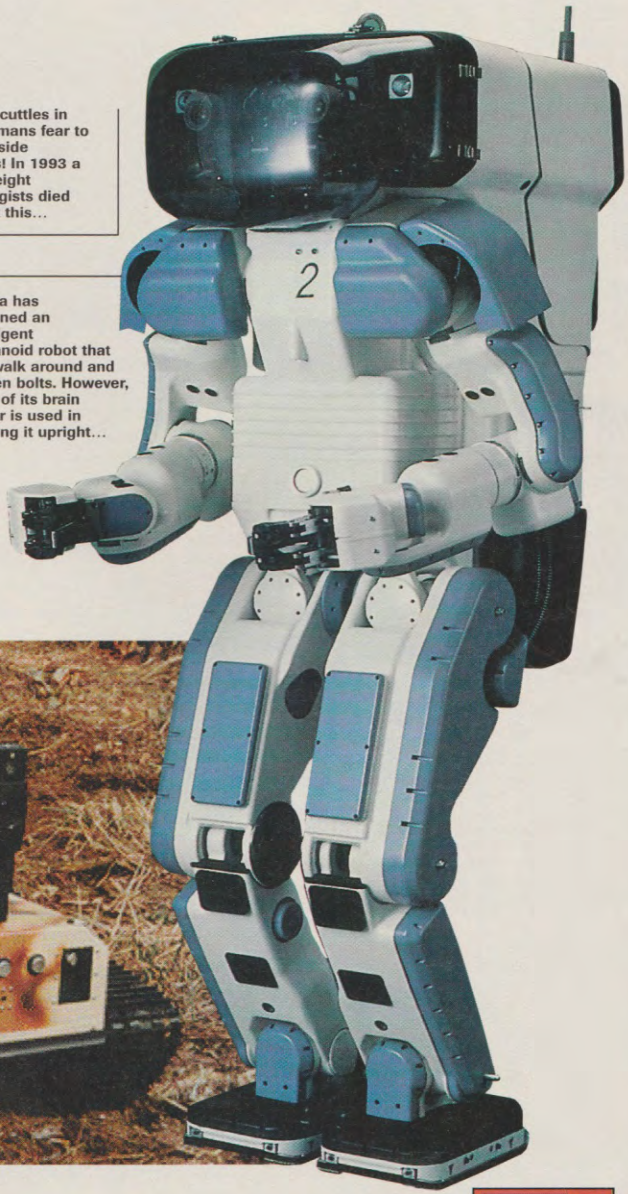
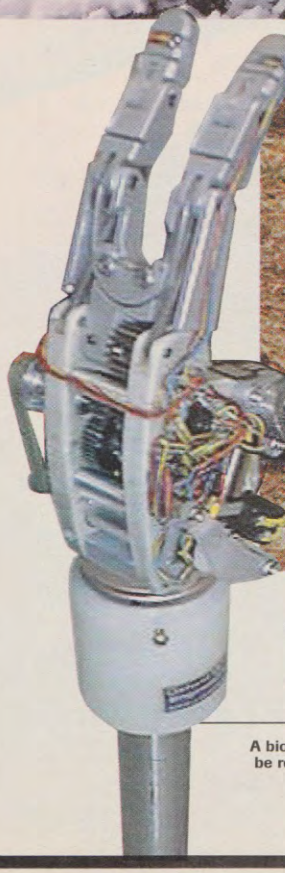
Dante II scuttles in where humans fear to tread – inside volcanoes! In 1993 a group of eight vulcanologists died doing just this...



Honda has designed an intelligent humanoid robot that can walk around and tighten bolts. However, most of its brain power is used in keeping it upright...

The ROAMS recon-robot sneaks behind enemy lines using satellite guidance and a remotely-controlled video camera to avoid things like traps. And stairs.



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HEROES ON THE EDGE

If dark superheroes or cyberpunk street samurai sink lower than their enemies, the games can quickly fail. Dark Champions author Steven S Long explains how to keep a grim world working...

"There are plenty of cruel, selfish bastards running around in the world, but few (if any) of them ever become heroes."

Most RPGs are morally pretty black and white; the good guys are obviously the good guys, the bad guys are obviously the bad guys, and the heroes' roles and goals are almost always crystal clear and obvious.

Fantasy games, especially those imitating epic fantasy such as Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, are perhaps the best example of this, with many superhero games, such as Hero Games' *Champions*, a close second.

While these games may feature the occasional backstabbing traitor or underground conspiracy, for the most part they offer no difficult moral dilemmas for the characters to deal with.

Dark games are different. In these games, morality shades to grey most of the time, and the characters cannot always be sure whether they're doing the right thing – much less the 'heroic' thing. The characters' agenda is likewise obscured; are they just out for themselves, and damn the rest of the world, or is there some higher purpose or goal that they're striving to fulfil?

Hero Games' *Dark Champions*, some of the World of Darkness games from White Wolf Game Studios, various games that take place in cyberpunk near-future settings, and even a few fantasy games like *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* are all examples of this sort of dark game.

Dark games offer special challenges for both players and referees. Anyone can be a hero when 'the heroic thing to do' is glaringly obvious to everyone, and most referees can keep a four-colour campaign going with a fairly straightforward series of opponents, challenges and environments.

But motivating dark characters and keeping dark campaigns fresh and interesting can be difficult, since the lack of a clear roadmap can be frustrating for players. With a little bit of forethought and work, though, a dark campaign can be kept alive and exciting for a long time.

THE CHARACTERS

The place for the referee to start is, of course, with the player characters (PCs). The PCs are the core element of the campaign, the characters around which all scenarios revolve. If they are somehow flawed, the whole campaign will suffer. Therefore, a referee who's getting ready to run a dark campaign should ensure that he has PCs that he can work with.

A Spark of Heroism

First and foremost, the referee needs to be sure that all characters, no matter how dark the campaign, have some redeeming features and are at least a bit heroic.

There are plenty of cruel, selfish bastards running around in the world, but few (if any) of them ever become heroes. Being a hero means looking beyond one's self, to see and solve problems in the world at large.

Even in a dark game, the PCs are supposed to be something better than the average person, and that doesn't just mean in terms of their strength, ability to aim a gun, or capacity for drinking blood. It means morally as well.

A character's morality is the key to motivating him and getting him involved in what's going on in the campaign. Characters who are completely introspective, or who are only motivated by money, desire to relieve ennui, or hunger for power can be almost impossible to weave into the fabric of a dark campaign.

A character who won't risk his life to save the proverbial child who's wandered out into the street in front of a speeding bus is a character you don't want in your campaign – working him into the game will be like pulling eye teeth. He'd rather sit around some smoky bar, drinking and moaning about how angst-ridden he is.

Characters who cannot see beyond themselves, beyond their own thoughts and desires, are death to any vibrant, active campaign.

What a referee really needs, even in a dark campaign, is characters who will leap to meet a challenge, do a good deed, accomplish something worthwhile.

Even if the characters go about this in dark ways, like shooting gang punks or a dictatorial government's goons, they are still doing something worthwhile.

But it's also important to remember that this is dark gaming we're talking about, after all – we're not talking the sugar plum fairy here.

The fact that characters should have some moral code does not mean that they all have to have to believe in the same things and react in the same way.

In fact, the very definition of a dark game almost precludes such agreement, since moral conflict is a staple of the genre. Characters may want to accomplish the same things, but they may have very different reasons for wanting this, and very different means of accomplishing it.

For example, think of two vigilantes, both equally interested in stopping crime. One is willing to be brutal and vicious if need be, but has sworn that he will never knowingly or deliberately take a life. The other carries more guns than your average battalion of soldiers and thinks nothing of shooting criminals in cold blood. Both of these characters are motivated by a distinct morality, and both fit well into a dark campaign. But are they going to see eye to eye on everything? Don't bet on it. Yet it's that sort of conflict that makes dark games so interesting.

OTHER MOTIVATIONS

There are plenty of other motivations for characters besides their moral codes, and the referee should make sure that at least some of them are present in his game. Here's a few basic character types:

The Servant

Whether it's God, the government, a megacorporation, or the Blood Prince of Birmingham, this character is beholden to some power greater than himself. In effect, he is an agent (or vassal) of that power, bound to act on its behalf or in its name – perhaps regardless of the consequences to others.

Perhaps the character is a spy serving a top-secret government agency, a 'special forces' soldier assigned to undercover operations, or a werewolf oathbound to serve the Elders of his tribe.

The character's moral code may revolve around his service to the organisation whether he is doing right or wrong in it's name, or he may be more of a maverick, serving an organisation whose goals he doesn't agree with for reasons that are all his own, such as blackmail, paying off a debt of honour, or straightforward self-loathing.

In the latter case, the character's eventual break from the organisation he serves, and what happens thereafter, are powerful story elements for the referee.

Searching for their Humanity

Another idea is to use the 'regaining humanity' ploy. This character has 'fallen from grace' and become something less than human, but he hopes to work his way back into the fold.

In some cases, the loss of humanity is obvious and physical, such as that of a man turned into a vampire. As he struggles to overcome the darker urges of his vampirism, he attempts to recover the humanity that he has lost.

It may be that there is some way for him to be transformed back into a man if only he can prove himself worthy. In other cases, the fall is entirely moral. This sort of character has failed or sinned in some way. For example, he may have spent years killing Afghan children as part of the Soviet KGB.

For some reason, the character has seen the error of his ways and is working to correct it. Although he uses the skills and knowledge born of his moral fall to help him in his journey back into the light, he is striving, in a sense, to make it to the point where he will no longer need to use them (or to redeem himself for his failure to use them).

In either case, this character is strongly motivated by his quest, and the referee can employ that as a storytelling tool and source of plots.

The Protector

One of your characters could be motivated by the need to protect something. Typically this is a person, such as a wife, significant other, or child, but it can just as easily be a place.

For example, a common character in many 'street-level' movies and stories is the 'protector of Chinatown', a character well-versed in Asian cultures who patrols the streets of the Asian neighbourhoods of his native city to protect the inhabitants from crime.

The loved one might be more amorphous still, such as a corporation or religious doctrine that the character has to protect, promote, or embody in some way. Threats (or perceived threats) to that which the PC desires to protect will always get him on the offensive.

The Risk Taker

Some characters get a kick out of risking their necks, and in a dark game setting, there are certainly plenty of risks for them to take.

Referees don't usually have to worry about getting these characters involved, since they like action, but they are also prone to doing crazy things that can easily throw off a well-planned storyline. The risk taker can prove to be a natural troublemaker both in the game and for the referee.

The Greedy Guy

Characters for whom money is the primary motivation can be bad news, as was discussed above.

But greedy characters can be good to have around, as long as money is not *too* important a factor in their decision making.

Characters who can be brought into the story by dangling a little cash in front of them are easily directed by the referee.

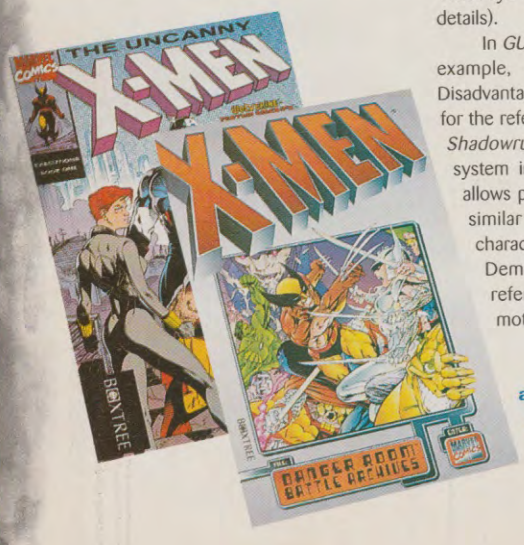
The same goes for characters who lust for jewellery, art, weapons, members of the opposite sex, technology, cyberware, and so on and so forth.

Manipulation

Even if the character doesn't fall into one of these categories, there are plenty of other motivations that can be used by the referee to get the character going.

In many game systems, characters are encouraged or required to construct characters with 'hooks' that the referee can use to motivate them, make them a part of the story, and drive plots (see 'Nobody's Perfect' in **arcane** 19 for more details).

In *GURPS* and the *HERO System*, for example, characters are built with Disadvantages, which in essence are tools for the referee to use in the campaign. In *Shadowrun*, the 'Edges and Flaws' system in the *Shadowrun Companion* allows players to build characters with similar hooks. World of Darkness characters must choose a Nature and Demeanour which will give the referee ideas about how to motivate his players.



The *X-Men's* Wolverine has a take-'em-down-permanently approach that can jar with other characters.

PROBLEM CHARACTERS

On the other hand, it's not just the characters with no moral code that can present special problems for referees of dark games. Referees must be on the lookout for these characters, because even one of them in the PC group can cause major trouble in a dark campaign (or in any type of campaign).

Some of them include:

The Blank

This character is nothing but an assembly of game statistics, skills, and weapons.

His background is not well-developed, his motivations are not thought out, and he has no real personality to speak. In other words, this character gives the referee no 'hooks' to work with, and no possible ideas for plots or story arcs. This character contributes so little to the campaign that it's usually not worth having him around.

The best way to deal with the Blank is to make sure all of your players understand that they are responsible for coming up with thoroughly developed, well-rounded characters.

The PCs are one of a referee's chief sources of plot hooks and adventures, and each player should be able to provide a few.

The Fish out of Water

This problem character comes in two varieties. The first is the PC who has no connection with the genre. His powers, motivations, attitude and just about everything else are completely inappropriate.

Unless the referee feels he can work with this, or use it as comic relief (with the player's permission), the player should be asked to create a new, more appropriate, character for the game.

The second fish out of water is the player who doesn't like the dark genre and has little, if any, idea of how to create characters or conduct his roleplay.

Assuming that the referee wants to keep this player involved, he will either have to work closely with the player to help him design and play his character ('train' him, if you will) assign a player to him who is more comfortable with dark gaming to help him out.

The Gun Freak

A variant of the Blank, this character's skills and equipment are all devoted to

combat – and nothing else.

He has more guns and more martial arts skills than any of the other PCs, is faster and more accurate than they are, and outclasses virtually all of the opposition in combat prowess.

In other words, this character is a walking, talking game imbalance, sure to turn everything pear shaped if the referee isn't careful.

As with the Blank, the way to avoid this problem is to make sure that the players understand that the referee wants balanced characters – characters who are good in both combat and non-combat situations.

There's nothing wrong with dark characters being skilled at combat. It just shouldn't be the only thing they're skilled at. If a character is not able to work in the game when he's not fighting, then he's just weighing everything down and needs to be fixed.

The Idealist

The idealist is a character who brings inappropriately lofty moral goals into the game, causing problems for the entire campaign and the rest of the PCs.

The most common example is a character who refuses to kill ('We'd be no better than the scum we're fighting against' is the typical justification) and who tries to stop other characters from killing or to impose his morality on them.

For better or worse, the use of lethal force tends to be commonplace in dark games, and a character who does not wish to use it should at least be able to tolerate it.

This is not to say that moral conflict is not an important aspect of dark games. In fact, it's one of the things that makes them so rich and fascinating, but taken to an extreme it can ruin the game.

To resolve the problem, the referee should make sure before the campaign begins that all the characters are sufficiently compatible to work together over the course of a campaign. They don't need to all get on like old friends, but a few links and similarities can be very constructive. If the referee doesn't get this sorted out, he's got a time bomb on his hands that will eventually cause his game to fall apart.

The Lone Wolf

This character takes the 'mysterious' part of the dark genre too far. He refuses to work with other characters for very long, keeps all of his secrets to himself (even when it slows the game down), and refuses to take the other characters into his confidence or trust them in any way.

A little mysteriousness is part and parcel of any dark PC, but too much can really slow the game down and make the referee's life difficult.

Again, the answer lies in being frank with the players as they design their characters. Make sure they understand that no loners will be tolerated. Every character is welcome to have his secrets, but not past the point that they detract from the game.

Furthermore, every character will be expected to work as part of a team. As long as the players understand this up front, this type of problem character can be removed before it even exists.

The Skill Monster

Similar to the Gun Freak, this character excels at something to the point of harming campaign balance.

In the Skill Monster's case, it's skills, particularly technical skills. When there's a Skill Monster around, there's no lock that can't be picked, no security system that can't be avoided or neutralised, no computer system that can't be hacked, no decking run that can't be easily accomplished. This can make it difficult for the referee to challenge the PCs.

The best way to sort this out is to establish campaign limits on the level of skill that characters can have, at least at the start of the campaign. As the game progresses, so can the characters' level of skill.

CAMPAIGNING

Not all of the problems that crop up in dark campaigns are related to the PCs. Some are simply inherent in the genre, but again, with a little forethought and effort they can be minimised or eliminated from the game.

The Arms Race

Guns, weapons, and other gadgets are an important part of just about any dark genre game. In games such as some World of Darkness products, weapons are sometimes replaced with special powers and abilities.

Unfortunately, there is a tendency on the part of players and PCs to try to obtain bigger, more powerful, or more efficient weapons, even when this violates genre conventions.

Relatively few comic book, cyberpunk, or action movie characters have on-demand access to sophisticated military helicopters, tanks, cutting-edge firearms and the like, but you'll find a few gaming characters that try their hardest to lay their hands on them.

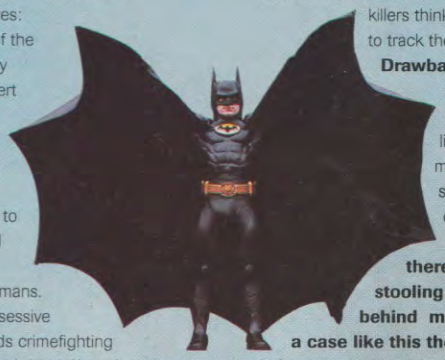
Of course, there are situations where the referee is going to want characters to have such equipment. One of the fun aspects of the genre is getting to play with 'toys' such as these and to trick them out with all the neat gadgetry we read about and see on the movie screen.

But too much of a good thing is bad for the game. When the firepower keeps creeping up and up, and the characters are constantly trying to outdo each other by having the

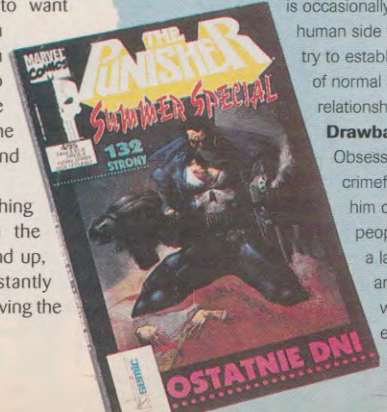
Role models

Name: Rorschach
From: *Watchmen*, by Alan Moore
Personality: Uncompromising scourge of the underworld; right-wing; sociopathic; paranoid; monomaniac.
Redeeming features: Clear moral agenda (very black and white view of the world); devoted to crimefighting; creative in combat (does not use guns; employs weapons of opportunity).
Drawbacks: Monomaniac (to the point of ignoring personal hygiene); sociopathic; vicious and cruel. A good example of a character who's taken his crusade against crime too far and gone over the edge.
Quote: "We do not do this thing because it is permitted. We do it because we have to. We do it because we are compelled."

Name: Batman
From: DC Comics
Personality: Dark avenger; obsessed crimefighter; totally unwilling to kill.
Redeeming features: Classic example of the 'millionaire playboy crimefighter'; expert martial artist and criminologist; skilled gadgeteer; able to use his intellect and skills to stand on an equal footing with powerful superhumans.
Drawbacks: Obsessive tendencies towards crimefighting can lead him to push himself too far; often ignores common courtesy and tact.
Quote: "There are seven working defences from this position. Three of them disarm with minimal contact. Three of them kill. One of them ... hurts."



Name: The Punisher
From: Marvel Comics
Personality: Ex-soldier vigilante; ruthless and willing to kill.
Redeeming features: Extremely skilled fighter; is occasionally able to let his human side through and try to establish some kind of normal life or relationships
Drawbacks: Obsessive life of crimefighting cuts him off from most people; possesses a large and varied arsenal of weapons and equipment – and uses them; frequently alienates those who are (or try to get) close to him.
Quote: "They fear the storm to come. That's how I like it. I am like the hurricane. There's calm in my eye. And I'd like to blow them all away...."



Name: Martin Riggs
From: *The Lethal Weapon* movies (played by Mel Gibson)
Personality: Slightly crazy police officer; stubborn, refuses to give up until he gets his man.
Redeeming features: Skilled marksman and martial artist; able to separate his job from his everyday life.
Drawbacks: Violence prone; a bit bonkers.
Quote: "You're my partner, why didn't you follow me down?"

Name: Will Graham
From: Red Dragon, by Thomas Harris
Personality: Forensic specialist; suffers from mental disturbances caused by cases he has investigated in the past.
Redeeming features: Ability to think like serial killers think and use that ability to track them down.
Drawbacks: Work interferes with his personal life; ability to think like serial killers makes him seem spooky and disturbing to some.
Quote: "See, there's a lot more stooling than sleuthing behind most arrests, but in a case like this there won't be any informants. He may not even know that he's doing it. So you have to take whatever evidence you have and extrapolate. You try to reconstruct his thinking. You try to find patterns."

Name: Butch
From: Pulp Fiction, by Quentin Tarantino
Personality: Aging boxer, losing his pride.
Redeeming features: Resourceful; never gives up; well-developed sense of honour; emotional attachments.
Drawbacks: Lack of pity for people he kills, even his colleagues.
Quote: "I've got to go back and get that gold watch. My father left it to me."

Campaign themes

GIVE ME LIBERTY!

PREMISE: The characters are guerrilla fighters who are attempting to overthrow or change an oppressive and morally corrupt government (or other institution). Their ultimate aim is to bring about a revolution that will overthrow the big bosses (whoever they may be).

Since they are cut off from the usual sources of supply (such as the government), they have to rely on their own wits, underground friends and contacts, and other such sources to keep them safe and supplied.

POSSIBLE CHARACTER TYPES: Weapon expert; computer hacker; inside man (pretends to be a member of the tyrannical government, but is secretly a freedom fighter); demolitions expert; ex-military man.

OUT OF THE ASHES

PREMISE: The characters live in a society that has been destroyed or radically changed. It may be a post-apocalyptic society, or it may be like most cyberpunk games in which traditional governments have collapsed and the world is, in essence, ruled by megacorporations. The characters' role is to correct whatever problems caused the societal collapse and set society back on the road to recovery. This usually means overthrowing whatever evil or tyrannical power is now in control, and then preventing other such powers from arising until a normal society can be re-established.

POSSIBLE CHARACTER TYPES: Archaeologist (someone skilled at recovering and repairing technological devices from the old society); former government/military man; scientists; repentant anarchists.

STREETCLEANING

PREMISE: Some group (or person) has taken over the underworld of the campaign city and is now ruling it with an iron hand. In the process it's causing the crime rate to rise, as its men commit more and more daring crimes and corrupt more and more people. The characters, perhaps with the help of former underworld enemies, have to eliminate this group. In the process they may have to deal not only with their chief enemy, but with traitorous allies, unsympathetic cops, and other unfriendlies.

POSSIBLE CHARACTER TYPES: Vigilantes; millionaire playboy crimefighters; former criminals turned good guys; renegade cops.

biggest guns, the game suffers.

To a certain extent, this problem is endemic to dark games (and in various guises, to just about all roleplaying games). However, there are ways for the referee to keep things under control.

Drop your Weapons...

First and foremost, the referee needs to control the characters' access to weapons and gadgets. Allowing characters to have extremely good skills at building or inventing gadgets is risky, as is giving characters contacts who are black-market arms merchants or weapons developers.

Monitor such abilities carefully, and make sure that the players understand that you are going to have to limit access to weapons and gadgets at some points in the game. Players are always more understanding when things are explained to them from the beginning.

Second, when it is necessary, for whatever reason, to give the characters bigger, better weapons or powers, do it in some limited way.

For example, maybe the weapon in question has a limited supply of ammunition that cannot be replaced or it gets irreparably damaged during combat. Perhaps the person who loaned it to them expects to get it back, and has the means to enforce that desire by employing repo men or refusing to cooperate further.

Third, surrender to the inevitable a little. Recognising that a certain amount of 'arms race' is always going to be present, allow the amount of firepower the characters have to increase slowly over time.

This will give the opposition time to match them, or almost match them, so that the PCs' advantage doesn't become overwhelming.

Character Conflict

As discussed above, conflicting morality among the PCs is one of the most interesting aspects of a dark campaign.

In a typical superhero, space opera, or epic fantasy campaign, the characters are all going to get along (except for occasional minor squabbles). After all, they have more or less the same goals, viewpoints, and opinions, so it only makes sense that they work together well.

But in dark games, this isn't always the case. Characters may have vastly different moral codes or viewpoints. One may be a vigilante killer, the other an idealist; one may be strongly motivated by profit, one by nobler impulses. These differences can help drive the campaign and the characters' relationships with one another, but they can also bring the game to a screeching halt.

Characters who are so strongly devoted to their own moral codes and goals that they cannot work with others will eventually either have to leave the group, or force the characters that disagree with them to leave.

This causes bad feelings on the part of players, and often ruins the referee's carefully prepared long-term plans and storylines, and has to be stopped before it starts.

Make sure before the game starts that the characters are all flexible enough to keep the group together. For example, the characters who kill have to be willing to restrain themselves, and the characters who don't kill will have to be able to tolerate some killing by others.

Also make sure that the characters are going to see interpersonal conflicts not as challenges to their manhood or power, but as opportunities for growth.

As long as all characters are willing to consider other opinions and learn from each other, their differences can only benefit the campaign. If none of them are willing to do this, those same differences will tear the game apart.

KEEPING IT FUN

Sometimes dark campaigns seem to degenerate into an endless series of similar scenarios.

It's another net-run, another raid on a corporation, another gang of street punks to take down, yet another new drug or vice flooding the streets. The referee has to work hard to keep the adventures varied and exciting.

Here are a few tips:

Summer Holiday

Whoever said that travel is broadening for the mind was right. Taking the PCs out of their familiar haunts, settings, and situations can be a great experience for both referee and players.

The characters get a chance to learn and experience new things, and their players have the opportunity to react to new situations and threats.

Visiting a new culture or city will always bring new adventure and excitement if the referee handles it well. Assuming your dark game takes place more or less in the modern day, travel can even include science fiction style settings; for example, space stations or other planets.

Take away their Toys

Characters tend to get comfortable with their favourite guns, weapons, gadgets, and powers. Taking those things away from them can give them new insight on their motivations and goals.

For example, suppose that a group of gun-toting characters has to assault a drug lab. They discover before the assault that ether is used to process the drugs, and that most of the workers are helpless innocents being exploited for slave labour.

Since a single random bullet could cause an explosion that would kill everyone (including the PCs), the characters will have to figure out some other way to deal with the situation –

hand-to-hand combat, for example. They'll get to exercise seldom-used skills, think about a combat situation in different ways, and maybe even figure out new directions for character growth and development.

Not everything in the game has to revolve around combat or adventure. A game session spent roleplaying an evening out for dinner and the opera, or a romantic date can be a lot of fun, even if no gun-toting terrorists intrude to spoil the event.

Combat-oriented characters will get a chance to develop and use obscure social and knowledge skills.

Weirdness

In games where the PCs are all normal (or mostly normal) human beings, throwing in some paranormal powers or events may be a gateway to many new adventures and scenarios.

Maybe the characters themselves will acquire very minor powers or abilities as the result of some accident or encounter, or maybe they will simply have to deal with paranormal marauders of some kind. UFOs, vampires and werewolves, odd psychic powers, and a host of other strange phenomena can intrude on the game and take the characters' minds off the gang bosses and megacorps down the street.

Seriality

An endless series of combats or scenarios connected only by the fact that the PCs are involved will quickly bore the socks off your players. But if the campaign is tightly interwoven, with events in one game affecting events in the next game (or the game three games down the road), the players will look forward to finding out what happens next particularly if they influence how the game world and its events are shaped.

If the referee stresses the serial nature of the campaign, he will almost always be rewarded with increased player interest.

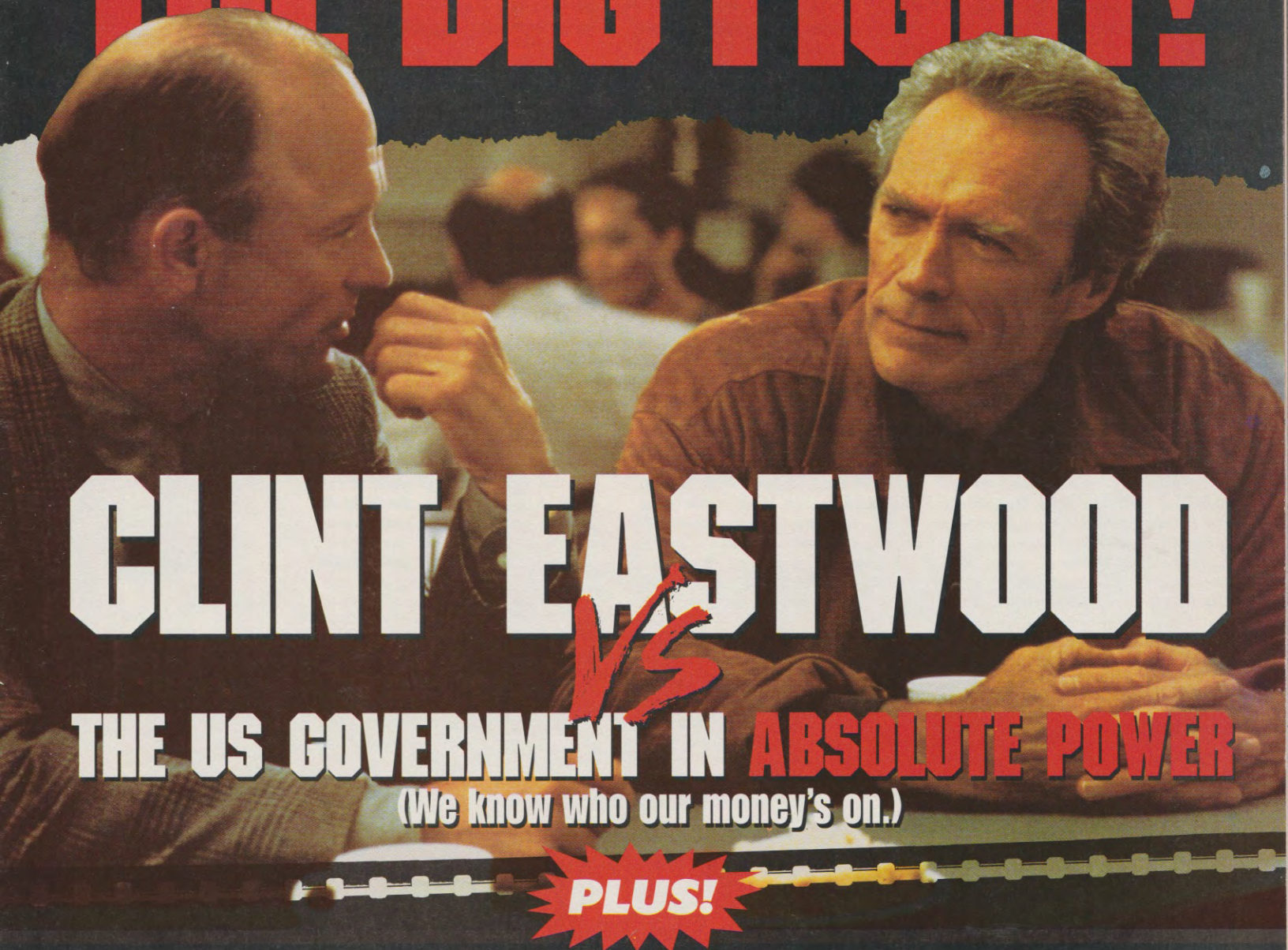
In the end, perhaps the best thing that a referee can do to keep his dark campaign as problem-free and exciting as possible is to pay attention to his players and find out what they want.

What do they hate? What would they really like to do in the game? The players and their characters are, after all, the central features of the campaign. If they're happy, and the referee's happy, then the game is a success.

THIS MONTH IN...

TOTAL FILM

THE BIG FIGHT!



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Moviestar Bowels VS All Sorts Of Horrors in Great Filmic Toilet Scenes!

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It's all in Total Film 5. On sale Thursday 8 May.

A little claustrophobia, says Sam Johnson, can breed a lot of... TERROR

Pop quiz: you're on a train passing through the Swiss Alps. You duck back into your cabin, where you find the compartment attendant ritually mutilated, tangled up in his own entrails. Looking out the window, you see a town flash by – wasn't that your stop? Is the whole staff dead?

The train's a runaway! Just then, you hear something land on the roof of the car, something big and heavy, with really big claws. What do you do? ***WHAT DO YOU DO?***

The formula, as used in *Die Hard*, *Speed* and a legion of other films works; take your hero, put him into a defined, enclosed environment and make it dangerous or fatal for him to try to leave. Then make it fatal for him to stay.

Bucketloads of tension is the result. Confinement applies itself well to any genre, but is at its best in its original home: horror.

Who can forget *The Shining*, where a terrified wife and son are forced to choose between a raging blizzard and an axe-wielding psychopath? Being trapped works just as well in a role playing game as it does on film: if the characters are trapped, they'll get scared.

If scary things are already going on, the fear will become that much more intense. When you're trapped, when you can't go home again, so there's no waking up from the nightmare.

Confinement scenarios also tend to work along two different lines: the Escape, where the protagonists are trying to get out of a sticky situation made stickier by their confinement, or the Siege, where the protagonists confine themselves in a tight spot, hoping to keep dangerous things out. Both types use the same three elements, and each element contributes in its own way to the atmosphere of the adventure. If any of the elements fails to measure up, the atmosphere of tension weakens, and the horror fades away.

Any gamemaster who wants to build an entrapment scenario for his players needs to understand exactly how and why confinement works. The three essential elements are the Setting (the enclosed environment itself), the Barrier (whatever prevents an easy escape), and the Danger (whatever makes leaving really necessary). These three elements are complimentary, each helping define the others.

The Where: Setting

When designing a confinement scenario, defining the place the players are trapped is often a good starting point.

The size of the setting will vary based upon the needs of the scenario. If the adventure is a siege, a smaller environment breeds more tension; since the players hope to keep something out, the less ground they can call their own, the less safe they'll feel.

On the other hand, escape scenarios lend themselves to big, sprawling environments with lots of twisting tunnels, dead ends and hidden nooks. The more likely the players are to get lost on their way out, the more tension they'll feel along the way.

Anything that limits the player's ability to interact with their environment makes the environment scarier. That's why so many thrillers or scary movies feature narrow, dark tunnels knee-deep in water. You might be surprised how tense you get when you can't see where you're putting your feet.

The actual location can be anything the Keeper's crafty heart desires. Mine shafts, sprawling Victorian mansions, remote research stations, ancient catacombs, dank sewers, bottomless caverns; all are ready-made fear generators. *Alien, 2001: a Space Odyssey,* and even *Apollo 13* all showed that spaceships also work well as places to be trapped. Vehicles seem to have an appeal all their own: the runaway bus or train, the ship lost at sea, the hijacked aeroplane.

A very unique tension arises from being trapped in a normal, everyday place. Stephen King's novel *The Mist* centres around a group of people trapped in a supermarket, and the characters of *Trucks* begin the story caught inside a truck stop.

In the film *Nick of Time*, the protagonist finds himself trapped, quite maddeningly, in a public place; the bustling Bonaventure Hotel. Being trapped in your own home (or any other house, for that matter) can be very harrowing indeed. Some 'normal' places can get quite sinister when you can't leave – ask any convict or mental patient.

Given the typical exploits of investigators/hunters of the paranormal, institutional confinement is not at all unheard of. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *The Shawshank Redemption* both illustrate the evils that can lurk within asylums or prisons, without the *Cthulhu* Mythos or the paranormal raising its ugly head. What if the con at the end of the row is a warlock, and demons prowl the pen by night?

As a final devious option, consider throwing the setting out entirely. If remoteness from civilisation is the barrier, the players can simply be trapped in the middle of nowhere. They're still trapped, but in the tundra, desert or jungle: they can leave all they want, they just don't ever seem to get anywhere. In these kind of scenarios there's almost no protection from the hostile barrier – the heat, cold, snakes, or whatever. Add a hostile predatory beast to the mix and the terror really begins.

The Keeper's task in regard to the setting is to define it as completely as possible. The setting itself should become an NPC, imprinting itself on every scene, every event. God is in the details: if the group is going to be spending some time here, it's good to know exactly what's in every room, just in case it suddenly becomes important. Also, in the event of a siege type scenario, the characters are going to spend a lot of time staring at the walls: be ready to describe that ugly paint job or peeling wallpaper in obsessive detail, just to drive them buggy. Any elements that the referee can lift from the page and introduce into the real world play

NO WAY

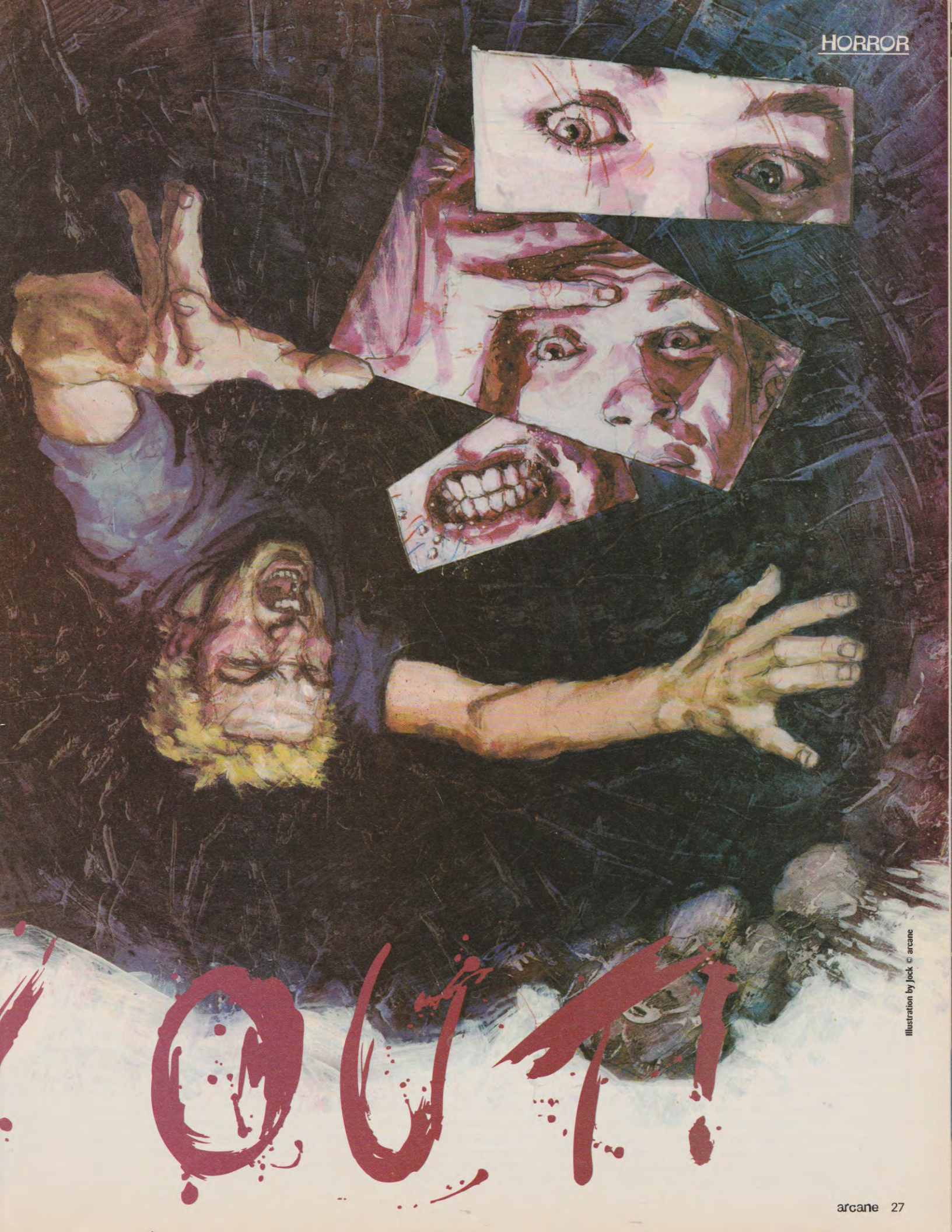

Illustration by Jock © arcane

who's in there with you?

Another option is to give the players companions in their confinement. They will vary from genre to genre and scenario to scenario, but any good disaster movie can provide a menagerie of archetypes, including:

THE COWARD

He's claustrophobic, paranoid, or just plain scared. He whines, complains, and absolutely refuses to help come up with a plan. When pushed, he'll either come around and redeem himself, or betray everyone to the monster to save his own hide.
MODEL: Hudson and Burke from Aliens

THE KID (OR KIDS)

Somehow, an innocent child got stuck in all of this. Nobody wants to see the kid get hurt. They're scared, they're tired, and they want to go home. When pushed, they either prove amazingly resourceful and resilient, or end up getting in the way and being held hostage.
MODEL: Newt from Aliens, the two kids in Jurassic Park

THE WOULD-BE HERO

A guy with more guts than brains. Willing to give anything a shot to get out, but his impulsive streak only ends up making things worse. He's the one who'll try to jump the chasm, force that stuck door, or take on the monster hand to hand. He usually ends up very dead.

THE CASUALTY

Either an older person with a weak heart or a medical condition that slows them down, or an injured man in dire need of assistance. If the barrier arose through a disaster, a wounded player character might end up in this role. The casualty slows the whole group down. Not only that, but he raises interesting dilemmas; in the face of the danger, can you leave him to die? Do you have the guts to watch them die in front of you?
MODEL: Mr. Orange in Reservoir Dogs, anyone with a pacemaker in an Irwin Allen movie.

THE THINKER

This character knows it all, and is sure that he can come up with a better plan than the players can. He raises a number of good points and has some good ideas, but tends to take way to long to debate them into action. Also, he denies the possibility of anything paranormal. If the monster rears its ugly head, he turns into a gibbering idiot.
MODEL: Gorman in Aliens

THE DEPENDENT NPC

Bad luck. Someone a PC really cares about is stuck in there with them, maybe a lover or a relative. Hostage-takers or monsters go for them first...
MODEL: McClane's wife in Die Hard

"Just to see the sun again. A little shiver coursed through me... It wasn't so much the monstrous creatures that lurked in the mist... it was the mist itself that sapped the strength and robbed the will. Just to see the sun again... That alone would be worth going through a lot of hell."
The Mist, Stephen King

"My recipe for horror is simple. You take some ordinary people, put them in an extraordinary situation, and then you squeeze... and squeeze... and squeeze. Sooner or later, something's gotta give."
– *Stephen King*, interviewed in the trailer for Maximum Overdrive

environment (noises, sounds, lighting, cramped conditions, or even the room temperature) will spark the imaginations of the players and Keeper alike, making the atmosphere even more palpable.

Why You Stay: The Barrier

In the simplest terms, the barrier is the thing that traps the players in the setting. Again, the nature of the barrier is variable, depending on the requirements of the scenario, but there are a few broad classifications.

Physical barriers are very effective. Cave-ins and avalanches are ideal for trapping people in nasty places. Floods, lava flows, or other natural disasters can also cut off escape routes. The characters might find themselves locked or sealed inside some complex. A malfunctioning security system might react to a monster (or the characters!) and drop ten ton steel plates down in front of the doors.

Physical barriers should not be insurmountable, but getting past them should require so much time or effort that simply digging out or waiting out the storm should be a last resort. The monster (or whatever else makes leaving imperative) won't let the players take the time to dig out, or allow them to stay in one place for very long.

Another popular barrier is a hostile environment. Space has served as the barrier in many stories: you just can't step outside your ship to escape the ravenous alien thing, you have to deal with it. Now. *The Abyss* used the cold, dark world of the ocean floor, while the hero of *The Thing* found himself trapped in the wastes of the Antarctic.

The underlying principle is the same: if you leave the setting, you will die. It might take hours or it might take seconds, but anyone foolish enough to run will drown/freeze/explode. Of course, limited means of surviving in the hostile environment (vac suits, mini subs, escape pods, heavy parkas, holding your breath) should be available, but only reliable enough for limited use. And to really be mean, gamemasters can make sure there aren't enough to go around.

If the environment is a moving vehicle, the barrier is obvious – if you jump out of the train/plane/automobile, you might just break your neck.

Vehicle based scenes often have other built-in deterrents to keep the players from wanting to escape. If you're trapped on a cruise ship with a shape shifting killer, you could abandon ship, but what untold damage will the fiend do when the ship arrives in New York?

Gamemasters are encouraged to come up with other types of barriers. To refer back to *Nick of Time*, the main character couldn't leave the hotel because his daughter was being held hostage. In *Reservoir Dogs*, fear of jail kept the crooks stuck in a warehouse.

A horde of hostile enemies also makes a very effective barrier, as the zombie hordes proved in *Night of the Living Dead* and *Prince of Darkness*.

The barrier in a confinement scenario often depends upon some kind of disaster. It's the classic movie plot: some calamity strikes the ship/building/traffic tunnel, leaving everyone stuck.

The disasters or accidents also serve as wonderfully tense encounters, as the players scramble to survive the earthquake or flood or cave-in or whatever. As a final note, the more random the accident or disaster is, the more devastating the confinement which follows. Human errors are even worse. Imagine the players' frustration when they realise they're stuck in this mine shaft because some idiot topside accidentally set off a blasting cap!

Why You Can't Stay: The Danger

Once the players realise that they're trapped, the Danger is what generates the story's conflict. Something goes terribly wrong with the setting: you can't leave, but suddenly you can't stay either. For horror games like *Call of Cthulhu*, injecting a monster into the mix is a good example of how to up the tension.

Lots of other things can go wrong, however. Gamemasters wanting to build horror without monsters can look at 'Battle Ye Not With Monsters' in arcane 16.

If you do use a monster, the more omnipotent it seems, the better. Remember the Alien, seeming to lurk in every shadow, or John Carpenter's *Thing*, which combined the worst aspects of a shape shifting monster and an infectious disease? Monsters which can assume a human form are the worst: who, in the end, can you trust?

The nature of the setting will determine what kind of defence the players can mount against the beastie. Blowing up the building to get the monster can be counterproductive if a blizzard is raging outside, or if the building is a submarine.

No gamemaster should overlook humans as monsters, either. While there were indeed strange beings lurking at the bottom of *The Abyss*, the crew of Deepcore was in much more danger from the psychotic Lt. Coffey.

Was the ill-fated main character in *The Shining* a victim of spectral possession or cabin fever? When the heat is on, tempers can rise, and paranoia can turn deadly. The trapped crooks in *Reservoir Dogs* ended up slaughtering each other over a difference of opinion. Players be warned: a crisis often brings out the worst in people.

Other factors can intrude as well. To really make the players anxious, suddenly

"Birch... did not shout long. It is doubtful whether he was touched at all by the horror and exquisite weirdness of his situation, but the bald fact of imprisonment so far from the daily paths of men was enough to exasperate him thoroughly... He would have given much for a lantern or bit of candle; but lacking these, bungled semi-sightlessly as best he might."
– *In the Vault, H.P. Lovecraft*

"How long after we're declared overdue can we expect a rescue?"
"Seventeen days."
"Seventeen DAYS? I hate to rain on your parade, but we're not gonna last seventeen hours!"
– *Ripley, Hicks, and Hudson, Aliens*

impose a time limit. What if the air supply is running out? What if the nearby atmosphere processor is going to explode in a few hours? The impending doom makes the tension all the more excruciating. Cruel referees will use multiple dangers, turning up the heat higher and higher.

The Abyss is a wonderful example: our heroes are trapped at the bottom of the ocean. Damage to the drilling platform has left them out of touch with the world, their oxygen is running out, and it's getting colder and colder. If that wasn't enough, both a hurricane and an international incident rage on the surface, the lead SEAL (armed with a nuclear warhead) is going insane, *and* there are strange creatures probing the station. How could things get worse?

Pressure: Why Confinement Works

Most role-playing game scenarios have definite goals. Dropping a sudden confinement into the plot adds another layer of tension; suddenly the players just want out! Defeating the bad guy or the monster might become a secondary consideration once the air runs out.

By the same token, if the monster is bad enough, self sacrifice can be a viable (if painful) option. Pressure to escape can turn the tables on a typical game group – instead of looking for danger, they're running from it. The barriers ensure that they have nowhere to run to.

Confinement also wrenches the players away from the familiar. Once trapped, there is no comfort zone, no place to retreat to. Severing all contact with the 'normal' outside world can have a brutal psychological impact. What if you can't call for help? Worse, how can you be sure any help is on the way? For players trapped underground, the lack of fresh air and sunlight make their confinement all the more uncomfortable.

Once the danger has been introduced into the setting, there's also no way for the players to 'recharge.' With a hideous beastie prowling the corridors, getting a good night's sleep might be impossible, or at least very dangerous. The world the players live in is now finite: whatever they have, that's all there is.

There's no way to run to the library for clues, call contacts for information, or go shopping for bigger guns (or more bullets!). Make them think about it: are you going to waste that first aid kit? How many bullets are you prepared to shoot? How many SOS calls can you send without worrying about the batteries on the radio? Is there enough gasoline for the generator? How long will you run the lights at night? Or the heaters?

When trapped for the long haul, the slightest waste could mean the difference between life and death. Once the arguments over food rationing begin, gamemasters won't need a monster to generate tension.

No Way Out

Confinement scenarios are at their best when the settings and barriers are extreme. *The Thing* and *The Abyss* are my personal favourites, because of the absolute isolation imposed on the characters. Settings as cruel as these can be a little tricky to incorporate into a campaign, however. It would take quite a leap of logic to explain how a group of typical *Call of Cthulhu* investigators 'just happen' to end up at the South Pole or in orbit.

If these remote locations serve as stepping stones or climaxes to an ongoing campaign, however, the work gets easier. After all, Lovecraft's fiction abounds with scary ruins lost in distant wastelands. The group could get trapped on a train or ship any time they need to travel. After they finally escape the Horror in the Hold, they'll think twice before travelling abroad in the future.

Think Laterally

A confinement scenario is a great way to start a campaign. The adventure would make a wonderful trial by fire, and any survivors would definitely share a common bond from the experience.

Another alternative is the one-shot. For a one- or two-session game, the Keeper is free to pick as wild a setting as possible. The players might comprise the first manned mission to Mars, for instance.

One shots have an added bonus for the Keeper – character survival is less of a concern, and if no one makes it out, the entire campaign won't be derailed. Don't take that attitude too far, however. If the players come to feel that their characters are expendable, they'll lose their fear of dying, and the tension will evaporate.

Can We Go Home Now?

Every confinement scenario should offer a way out. The way may not be obvious and must not be easy, but the referee should devise one.

Understanding of the barrier and setting are critical: the gamemaster must continually thwart the players' efforts to escape, yet leave them thinking an escape is still possible.

Don't doom the players' plans to arbitrary failure; they'll quickly lose interest in the game. Give them smaller tasks to perform that build up to an escape. After some dicey tinkering, they manage to get an SOS call out, or perhaps (with a little work), they can extend the air supply but not indefinitely. This keeps the players busy, and presents them with new challenges.

The tools the players need to escape should be all around them, built into the setting. They might have to do some clever improvising, but if the task is too easy, escape isn't so sweet a reward.

Plan Clever

Referees should always remember that the collective brain power of a group of players can be more than their own. Be ready for solutions that you might never have thought of, and know enough about the barriers to come up with reasons why they might not work. Really cruel Keepers (especially in a one-shot) are well within their rights to leave no escape, and have the players fight it out to the grim and bitter end.

"We have no way of warning the surface. Whatever happens here is up to us. US."
– *Lt. Coffey, The Abyss*

While really horrifying, these types of games tend to alienate the players quickly. Just as unsatisfying is a sudden rescue out of nowhere, deus ex machina to the rescue. Outside help is always a good way home, but try to ensure that the search parties would never have found the players if they hadn't come up with that clever signal.

The suggestions above are only a beginning. Let your imagination run wild! With a little work, before long your players will cry out "For the love of God, Montresor! Lock the doors!"

Scenario Seeds

Children of the Wheat

The investigators are called in when a number of children and cattle go missing out in the back woods of wherever. After a little digging, they find old man Willard's farm sits at the centre of the affected area. Heading out to the farm, the find it deserted. Then the terror begins.

Old man Willard was a devoted follower of Shub Niggurath, and at last succeeded in 'blessing' his farm. Now, all the animals are enormous, bloated parodies of themselves, even the insects, and the plants are mobile, semi-sentient predators with a taste for human blood. The investigators end up trapped inside the decaying farm house, surrounded by a harvest of death. Are Willard's diaries and sacred texts hold the key to ending the nightmare? Oh, by the way, just what are you going to do about the green moss that's springing up everywhere? Whatever you do, don't touch it!

Confined with the Pharaohs

While helping out at an archaeological dig in Egypt (or investigating a series of thefts there), Dr. Richardson stumbles upon an ancient, hidden tomb complex! While exploring it, one of his assistants shows his true colours, steals a priceless crown, and runs, collapsing the entrance with dynamite. Now the investigators are trapped, deep underground, in a labyrinth of tunnels. Is the air really getting more and more stale? To make matters worse, the pharaoh's treasure has a guardian, who stirs for the first time in millennia.

The Body Thief

A pleasure cruise turns into a nightmare as passengers begin dying, one by one. The culprit: an ancient serpent man sorcerer, indulging himself in a little terror while on his way to the New World. Armed with a hypnotic gaze and a particularly nasty version of the Consume Likeness spell (which requires the caster to eat the victim's face and brain), the snake is shopping for a new identity.

If faced with a determined group of investigators, the snake will eventually sabotage the engines, setting the ship adrift in the middle of the Atlantic. If the fiend can't be stopped before help arrives, he'll just assume (or consume) a new face, allow himself to be rescued, and vanish into the next teeming port. What follows is a tense game of cat and mouse, or cobra and mouse.

TAKE 'EM DOWN!

Cinematic/four-colour roleplaying is all the rage. If you're going to play a superhero or an action movie star, you can't screw around. You've gotta be cool, kick butt and take names. John Tynes knows the score.

© the moviestore collection

You're a hero. A two-fisted, no-holds-barred tough guy (or gal). Your name is legend, your enemies quake in fear. The ground you walk on will soon be soaked with the blood of the guilty.

So why are you acting like such a loser?

Getting into the style of cinematic/four-colour action ain't like dusting crops, boy. You can't just pussyfoot around. You've got to take charge, call the shots, and act with no regrets. You've got to be an action hero. When you go into combat, it's gotta be with guts, not with trepidation.

To be a real cinematic/four-colour action hero, you've gotta have three things: panache, ingenuity, and guts. If you can work these things into roleplaying your character, you'll go far.

"And what do you propose to do?" "I'll organise a revolt. Exact a death for a death. And I'll never rest until every Saxon in this shire can stand up, free men, and strike a blow for Richard and England!" *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (Panache)

PANACHE

Cinematic/four colour action games like *Feng Shui* or *Champions* present a world where you're on top – most of the time, at least. You're probably substantially above average on most of the game's scales of human ability.

Most people couldn't take you in a fight if their life depended on it. It's only other extra-tough people like yourself who you have to worry about, and most of them you can take in a fair fight anyway.

What does this mean? Quit wussing out! This isn't *Call of Cthulhu*. Talk big, act big, think big. When you open that door you're not going to be looking up at an aeons-old lord of the cosmos who can make your brains explode; you're going to be staring down at a bunch of frightened little losers trying to heist a bunch of fur coats so they can pay their bar tab at Vinny's Big Jugs & Grill. Make 'em really fill their trousers!

The way to enter this situation is not to go slinking around so you won't get in a fight. The way to enter this situation is to ignite a smoke bomb, kick in the door, yell something frightening and then stride cold-bloodedly in through the roiling fog.

"Wah!" you cry. "They might shoot at me!" Who cares? You think a buncha mooks are gonna gun your heroic ass down? Get real! Criminals are a superstitious, cowardly lot, and lousy shots, too.

"Wah!" you persist. "What if the big boss guy is there? He's a good shot!" Quit whining! Do you really think the big boss guy is going to just shoot you on sight? Especially after you made such a mondo entrance? No!

He's got to look tough in front of his men (who are all quaking in their boots at the sight of your awesomeness and thinking that maybe they're on the wrong side). So he's going to stride out of the shadows, say something menacing, and dare you to attack. You'll both circle around for a bit swapping insults, he'll sic his mooks on you, you'll stomp them, he'll get away, and you'll find the clue that leads to the next fight scene. No worries.

You've got to remember the kind of game you're playing, the kind of genre you're using, the kind of character you're portraying. You're an action hero, and you need to have the panache to match. If you get into your character and play him to the hilt, your GM should reciprocate by making your scenes with the villain more dramatic, by making the mooks even more pathetic, and by giving you more opportunities to have fun.

INGENUITY

Action heroes never lack for a good idea. That's because they're created by professional writers, who can spend months staring at a blank piece of paper, guzzling booze 'til their liver bursts, and finally figuring out the absolutely coolest stunt for the action hero to pull.

But as a roleplayer, you've got to be an action hero – you've got to think on your feet. You've got a little more real time than your character does in game time, but not much. To do your action hero justice, you've got to always be looking for an angle.

Television, as it does in all spectra of life, provides a flawless role model for us to emulate: MacGyver. MacGyver doesn't use guns, doesn't even fight that much if he can help it. Instead, he uses ingenuity to save the day.

Let's say that MacGyver is in some banana

ICONS OF COOL

They loom large upon the silver screen, those heroes of our flickering cinema days. They fight hard, stand tall, and in the end they're a lot cooler than we are. Still, we can copy them can't we?

Name: Cyrano de Bergerac
Features In: Cyrano de Bergerac, Roxanne
Cool moves: He bests opponents with cunning insults as well as swords. (Panache)

Name: The Man With No Name
Features In: Fistful of Dollars and numerous other spaghetti westerns
Cool moves: Striding down a dusty street in a big poncho, taking one bullet after another and still coming on relentlessly – 'cos he's got a big sheet of metal under that poncho. (Ingenuity)

Name: Ash
Features In: Evil Dead, Evil Dead II: Dead by Dawn, Army of Darkness (Evil Dead III)
Cool moves: Even when his own hand turns against him, Ash never quits fighting. (Guts)

Name: Han Solo
Features In: As if!
Cool moves: Scaring a bunch of Stormtroopers by yelling at them (Panache) Hiding from the Empire in his ship's smuggling holds (Ingenuity) Not getting flustered about being frozen (Guts)

republic and there's a dozen personnel carriers sitting in the evil coup leader's compound. In about five minutes he's going to send a hundred armed thugs into those carriers and they're going to roll into the town plaza and kick out the good-intentioned but feeble-willed mayor. What will MacGyver do? He can't fight all those people, he doesn't have any mines to blow up the carriers with and the town is defenceless until the federals arrive. So McGyver goes into a cantina and grabs a big bag of sugar. "Sugar? This is no time for shortbread!" Hah! MacGyver runs back outside and dumps a load of sugar into the gas tank of each vehicle. Va va voom, and this little coup is over before it starts.

You've got to visualise the location of critical scenes in your head. Imagine it's a movie. What's around you? What do you need to accomplish? What do you see in your head that can help you achieve that goal?

The point is, you can't rely on the GM to spoon-feed you the clever little bits of stuff you'll need to pull a slick move. You've got to extrapolate from what he does tell you and then ask innocently if there's a such-and-such there. "So we're in the motor pool? I don't suppose there might be some cans of oil around, are there?" (He's expecting gasoline, and was going to say no – but oil? Why not!) Pour it out in front of the barracks door, make a commotion, and presto – you've got the drop on a half-dozen stumbling, flailing guards who can't stand up straight let alone get their guns out. That's ingenuity, baby.

"'Wah!' You cry. 'They might shoot me!' Who cares? You think a buncha mooks are gonna gun your heroic ass down? Get real!"

Guts

Last but not least, you need guts. Guts might sound similar to panache, but there's an important difference: panache is what you call it when you're in no real danger – it's just posturing. But guts is what you call it when the spit hits the fan and it's time to show why you're a hero. Panache is the promise; this is the payoff.

What does it mean to have guts? In other styles of roleplaying, there's a line that you won't have your character cross, a line that demarcates the point where the character will more than likely die or be hurt very badly. In those other kinds of games, you'll almost always pull back from the brink because you're very conscious of your character's mortality.

In cinematic/four-colour roleplaying, this is less appropriate. This is when you need guts, when you need to step across that line and do that dramatic, risky, desperate thing that you wouldn't do in other games. This is the defining moment of the cinematic/four-colour style, when you toss all that ingrained behaviour aside and really go for it. Because chances are, you'll win; that's why you're an action hero.

For example, the bad guy is in his chopper and has just lifted off and flown past the edge of a cliff. In other games, this is the point where you turn to the authorities, find the clue that tells you where he's going, or just stand there and say something like "Next time!" But in the cinematic/four-colour game, this is where you glare at him with steely eyes, take a running start, and leap off the cliff. As you sail through the air, you're shooting his face off/throwing a stun charge into the cabin/using your mental powers to dominate the pilot, and then you grab onto the undercarriage with your free hand.

"Wah!" you cry again. "I might not make it! I might die!"

Maybe. Maybe not. See, you've got guts. You've got ingenuity. You've got panache. You've taken a step that you wouldn't have taken in another roleplaying game. And this is where it pays off – because even if you miss grabbing that undercarriage, the GM will offer the surprise announcement that while yes, this is a cliff edge, there's a ledge about twenty feet down. You'll hit the ledge hard and lose consciousness, sure, but as your vision blanks out you'll see the helicopter spinning crazily as it spirals down into the gorge and explodes. Congratulations.

The Shared Illusion

See, roleplaying is a shared illusion. The nature of the world you play in depends on the game you're playing. In some worlds, gravity is a force of nature; you fell off the cliff, you're going to die. But in other worlds, gravity is a dramatic force; you fell off a cliff, but only far enough to knock you out because that's dramatically appropriate given that you made a classy move.

The players and the GM have to be on the same wavelength. If you play your action hero like an OAP, your GM has every right to make the game world realistic. But that's not the idea. If you play your action hero like an action hero – with panache, ingenuity, and guts – your GM should reciprocate and rev the cinematic/four-colour throttle up to eleven.

That way, when you take that big risk for the sake of being true to the genre, the GM will likewise be true and not just kill you outright. This doesn't mean he should reward stupid behaviour, but if your pulses are pounding and the pizza is forgotten and the dice are smoking, the GM should meet you halfway.

You're an action hero. Cut loose. Be cool. Take 'em down.

"Maybe you will come in handy. While they're eating you, I'll get away."
Tremors 2: Aftershocks (Ingenuity)

"I see a red sash, I kill the man wearing it! So run, you cur – run! Tell all the other curs the law is coming! You tell 'em I'm coming, and hell's coming with me – you hear? Hell's coming with me!"
Tombstone (Guts)

The Arabs said that "two may make a quarrel, but two hundred unfortunately, it doesn't always succeed...

The book

Leave the curly slippers and souvenir lamps at the souk. Phil Masters presents a world of sophisticated city dwellers, djinn and desert raiders.

The young thief staggered through the desert heat, in search of an oasis. A cry behind him made him turn. He saw what he feared more than thirst; a band of soldiers, led by his deadliest enemy – the Vizier, his rival for the hand of the Sultan's only daughter!

The thief had no choice; he twisted the ring on his finger. At once, a tower of smoke burst from the ground, gathering into the shape of the great Djinn. It grinned malevolently: "What is your third and last wish, Oh Son of Adam...?"

A classic fantasy scene – inspired by a specific source; the folk-tales of the Islamic Near East, especially those of the *Thousand and One Nights*. The region's culture, history and traditions are a rich and varied source of material for RPGs.

'Vizier,' 'Sultan' and 'Djinn' are all Arabic words that would have sounded alien to any European two or three hundred years ago. Even today, they give any story a dash of the exotic.

Throw in a formal prose style created by European translators trying to catch the flavour of Eastern texts, add wonderful scenery – both natural and architectural – and it's not surprising that the 'Arabian Nights' style provides more than a few useful ideas.

But Arabian roleplaying needn't even be restricted to fantasy. The region has been an arena for warring empires throughout history, and remains a focus of world politics today.

Even distant worlds in space opera can feature burning deserts, robed warriors, and fabulously wealthy emperors – just look at the *Dune* epic.

Islam

The Arabs have been on the fringes of Western history since it began. Desert tribes, camel-herders and bandits lurked on the borders while Egypt, Assyria, and Persia rose and fell. Arabs also carved out kingdoms of their own such as Petra and Palmyra, usually based on trade.

These tribesmen rose to prominence with the emergence of Islam. In about 610 AD, a merchant caravan-leader named Mohammed had a series of visions while meditating in a cave outside his home city of Mecca.

His messages, eventually written down as the Koran, formed the basis for a religion which in turn became the foundation for a new empire.

After Mohammed's death, the alliance of communities that he had forged around Mecca expanded rapidly, conquering the exhausted Persian Empire and capturing provinces from the Byzantines. By the end of the seventh century, Islam was a world power.

However, by that time, divisions had appeared within the faith, starting with a dispute over the succession to Mohammed's leadership; this led to the split between the Shiite and Sunni sects which holds to this day.

Despite the infighting, the Abbasid Dynasty, which rose to power in the eighth century, became the leaders of a Muslim golden age. The Abbasid Caliph Haroun al-Rashid, who ruled from 786 to 809 AD, features in many stories.

After Haroun, however, the empire began to crumble, as power shifted to military commanders, and provincial governors made themselves rulers. Turkish soldier-dynasties assailed the Byzantines, who appealed to their fellow Christians in Europe for aid. They got more than they had bargained for.

The Crusades started in 1097 AD, and dragged on for centuries. At first, they were successful, mainly because the Muslims were disorganised.

However, the Crusaders soon became rather sloppy themselves and Muslim leaders such as Saladin slowly but steadily pushed them back. Only the

A DJINN: "...The smoke resolved itself into a jinnee of such prodigious stature that his head reached the clouds, while his feet were planted on the sand. His head was a huge dome and his mouth as wide as a cavern, with teeth ragged like broken rocks. His legs towered like the masts of a ship, his nostrils were two inverted bowls, and his eyes, blazing like torches, made his aspect fierce and menacing..." – from *The Fisherman and the Jinnee*

A Thousand and one Nights

A great king discovers that his wife has been unfaithful, and subsequently comes to the conclusion that all women are untrustworthy. So he resolves to marry a virgin every night, and to have his new bride executed every morning.

Eventually, Scheherazade, the daughter of the king's Vizier, determines to end this. She marries the king herself, and that night, she starts telling stories. But she ends each story on a cliff-hanger, and the king let her live so that he could hear the ending.

She repeats this trick for a thousand and one nights, in which time she bears the king three sons; eventually, he gives up his plan.

This is the framework of the Arabian Nights, a vast collection of popular 'coffee-house' stories, from heroic sagas to short jokes, that has circulated in the Muslim world for centuries.

The structure is loose; stories drifted in and out, and changed over time. Eventually, the collection was translated into European languages, and the changes continued with the translations; it's possible that *Nights* tales such as *Ali Baba* and *Aladdin* were actually added by Europeans. Certainly, the noted Sir Richard Burton tinkered a great deal with content and style in his translation.

The 'story within a story' framework gives the *Nights* a multi-layered air, which might be carried over into RPGs. Any Arabian-style game-world should certainly involve storyteller characters, and adventurous playing groups could build multi-layered campaigns, with one bunch of characters telling stories that turn out to involve another group, in a different style of game with different rules, but with cross-references between the plots.

'Complete' translations of the *Nights* are hard to find, but there are plenty of selections and partial versions. Unfortunately, many of these are either heavily censored or produced by writers with weird ideas.

The Penguin version of *Tales from the Thousand and One Nights* is probably the easiest place to start. Readers interested in the history of this subject should look for *The Arabian Nights: A Companion*, by Robert Irwin.

may die for it."

much Islamic law is designed to reduce the risk of tribal blood-feuds.

# of Arabia

Mongols, who attacked the Muslims from the east, enabled the Crusaders to survive as long as they did.

The Islamic world remained powerful throughout the Middle Ages; the Ottoman Turks built an especially strong empire, which launched serious invasions of Europe. But the European 'Age of Exploration' followed the Industrial Revolution left the increasingly conservative Muslims trailing.

The ramshackle despotism of Turkey, 'The Sick Man of Europe', fell to pieces after the First World War. The world depicted in the *Arabian Nights*, which still existed when Europeans discovered the book, has now disappeared.

Arabian Games

From the roleplaying point of view, the Arabian world is probably easier for modern gamers to get their heads around than Feudal Europe.

Feudalism was rural and agricultural; old Islamic culture, on the other hand, was urbanised and mercantile. City-dwellers had an accepted position, and merchant-adventurers could be heroes, not weird exceptions to the norm.

Of course, it helps if gamers forget a few clichés. For example, most people in the West believe that Islamic law is about thieves getting their hands chopped off. But the system originated in the Middle Ages, when European justice was just as heavy on branding and amputation.

the gaming magazine arcane CAMPAIGN IDEAS

Compared to Western justice at the time, the Muslim code was at least quite balanced, with amputation only being imposed for non-trivial thefts, and strict rules of evidence. In other words, in a 'realistic' game, this sort of penalty should be a serious threat, but it shouldn't dominate play.

The position of women in Islam may also lead to complications. Islamic law, and Arab tradition, imposes a code of modesty, especially women, and tends to take a sexist view of things; female testimony is worth less than male in court, for example. Again, this isn't much harsher than traditions in Victorian England, which had similar evidence laws.

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styles and systems

***Arabian Nights* or *Near Eastern* role-playing games can come in a range of flavours...**

DESERT DUNGEONS: Near-standard fantasy, with an Arabian tinge. Larger-than-life (but not superheroic) adventurers in chainmail armour (but not usually plate) seek adventure in ruins, cities, or palaces. However, the monsters are ghls and giant snakes, the cities have lots of domes, and the palaces have harems.

See the *Nights* tales of Sinbad, the Arab legend of *Antar*, Susan Shwartz's *Arabesques* anthologies, Terry Pratchett's *Sourcery*, Disney's version of *Aladdin*, and any of the films called *The Thief of Baghdad*. Most generic fantasy systems can be adapted for this style, and many have relevant supplements – *AD&D* has *Al-Qadim*, *Rolemaster* has a good *Arabian Nights* sourcebook, and the relatively realistic *GURPS* has *GURPS Arabian Nights*, which I won't comment on because I wrote it. The big problem is that you may have to break some players of their old mind-sets, and some rules may need a bit more work than first appears; for example, it's hard to fit in elves and dwarves.

STREETS OF THE BAZAAR: The Nights are 'populist' stories; why not try a gritty Eastern 'streets' game, with or without magic? Similarly, the survival of Islamic culture today raises the possibility of running contemporary or 'gritty SF' games with an Arabian slant. See some of the shorter *Nights* stories, or George Alec Effinger's cyberpunk *When Gravity Fails* (covered by a sourcebook for Cyberpunk). Rules to consider include the quick and simple *Over the Edge* (which I've adapted successfully for medieval Arabian Nights games), or any cyberpunk system. Set this early in the twentieth century, add horror ('Mythos' or not) and *Call of Cthulhu* is the obvious choice; see the *Cairo Guidebook*.

ARABIAN HIGH ADVENTURE: Alternatively, draw on more 'high-power' sources, and run adventures based on Hollywood *Sinbad* movies or the demon-wrestling princes of pre-Islamic Persian myth. Suitable rules include high-level *AD&D*, or even a superhero system such as *Champions*. Refs who have the time for serious reading should look at the Persian *Shah-Nama* (The Epic of Kings); otherwise, see those Harryhausen *Sinbad* films, and perhaps Tanith Lee's pre-Islamic-style *Flat Earth* series.

HISTORICAL HEROICS: There is a large selection of stories and movies with more or less Arabian settings and a basis in history; these range from the gritty, through the epic, to the swashbuckling. See films such as *Casablanca*, *El Cid*, or *Lawrence of Arabia*, novels such as Lindsey Davis' *Last Act in Palmyra*, or the autobiographies of Sir Richard Burton and Charles Doughty. For a fantastical-Victorian version of this, *Castle Falkenstein* is the obvious rule-set; an Ottoman Empire sourcebook is forthcoming (I hope – I wrote it). For a more realistic approach, especially for games set in recent times, try *Call of Cthulhu* again, while *GURPS* retains the virtue of versatility.

The Muslims borrowed an idea from the conquered Persians – women should not only remain modestly at home, but, if possible, be locked away in harems.

Islam also retained the old Arab tradition of polygamy, allowing a man up to four wives. Taking advantage of this, later rulers cheerfully added huge harems of concubines.

But women were not completely powerless; some *Nights* stories feature resourceful and adventurous women.

fate and allah

One other important part of the world-view is an overwhelming belief in Fate. Arabian tradition has it that a person's fate is predetermined; for example, no one can avoid death when it is due. This philosophy produces brave warriors; it also comes through frequently in stories, where poor characters are raised to wealth by blind luck, and powerful princes end up as homeless wanderers. This sort of thing makes for dramatic, roller-coaster game plots, if players are willing to tolerate it.

All-powerful fate is sometimes described by reference to the Will of Allah; honour and piety lie in responding nobly to this. This doubtless helped Islam fit in with Arabic society from the first. Islam is a religion that doesn't have the biblical line about 'rendering unto Caesar that which is Caesar's'; it is a faith with clear ideas about how the world ought to be run, which a good Muslim should try to see enforced.

This doesn't mean that all Muslims spend their time trying to take over the world; what it means is that there is definitely such as thing as a "Muslim society'.

In lands where Muslims are in the majority, religious leaders have considerable influence. Of course, other nations have been dominated by religious rules, but in Islam, religion and government were linked from the first.

The Caliph was actually the 'Successor' to the Prophet – the heir to Mohammed's leadership. Through to the Abbasid era, he was both leader of the Empire and 'Commander of the Faithful'.

But after Haroun, the Caliph was increasingly pushed around by other powers; meanwhile, the empire was breaking up. Ideas about religion diverged, and rival 'Caliphs' took power in different areas.

The last Caliph of Baghdad was killed by the Mongols in 1258. Nonetheless, Muslim rulers often laid claim to the title; this usually meant controlling Mecca and Medina (the holy cities), and also Baghdad. The final Ottoman Sultan, deposed in 1922, was the last claimant.

Islam is at heart a straightforward religion. It's main tenets are laid out in the Five Pillars.

The most important, which makes a person a Muslim, is to say, at least once in their life, with complete belief, "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is His Prophet." Muslims should also pray five times a day, preferably in a mosque.

Third is a tax, the Zakat, for the help of the poor; this often takes the form of a voluntary donation. Furthermore, Muslims should fast from daybreak to sunset during the lunar month of Ramadan. Last is the Hajj, the Pilgrimage to Mecca (at a particular date in the year), which every Muslim should perform at least once in their life if possible.

The Hajj can be very significant to games set in any Islamic society; it gives anyone a reason to travel, it enables Muslims from any part of the world to meet, and in communities where few can afford to travel, the title of Hajji is immensely prestigious.

Islam can be puritanical; for example, it often disapproves of representational art, comparing it to idolatry. This has led Muslims to concentrate on abstract design and elegant calligraphy. Some Muslims even take against music, although most aren't that strict.

On the other hand, the religion's ban on alcohol is usually taken very seriously. There are also 'halal' dietary laws, including a ban on pork.

Islam was always a conquering religion; it's not hopelessly violent, but warriors fit right in. Death in battle, when fighting for Allah, guarantees entry to Paradise. It's hard to imagine a truly pacifist Muslim society, although Muslims would say that the victory of Islam guarantees peace.

The Koran appears to rule out forced conversions ("there is no compulsion in religion"), but Islam rarely gets on well with 'pagans'; in practice, it only really tolerates the 'People of the Book' who worship one God, and who have their own prophets and sacred texts. This mostly means Christians and Jews, and – at a stretch – Zoroastrians.

Also, having been built on victory, and having strong social and moral ideas,

FANATIC KILLERS: The Assassins were actually members of a heretical Islamic sect, who established headquarters in remote mountain castles. They were fanatics, perfectly willing to die in order to kill the enemies of the cult.

Islam sometimes seems to respond especially badly to being on a losing side.

Islam also has a mystical strand. Sufis seek direct knowledge of Allah through meditation or various disciplines. Sufi mystics are called Dervishes; originally lone wanderers, most now live in monastic communities.

The 'Whirling Dervishes' use their spinning dances as a route to new states of mind; other orders may use music, or poetry. In the past, weirder Sufis have used drugs and other extreme behaviour, but most despise such things. Dervishes range from solitary, distrusted eccentrics to some of the fiercest religious fanatics.

Islam is an essential part of the *Arabian Nights* picture. This can lead to problems if refs try to fit an 'Arabian Style' society into a typical fantasy world with a multitude of very active gods.

Of course, the 'pseudo-Arabians' could be followers of one god who's trying to exclude all the others, but this isn't a stable situation, especially if the other gods are inclined to hit back.

Alternatively, it's possible (but not easy) to bodge a many gods arrangement into such a setting (see TSR's *Al-Qadim*). In a lower-key, more realistic world, where deities don't interfere, or only do so subtly, there's less of a problem; this may well be the best way to go.

The Djinn

Arabian legend has its share of supernatural creatures and monsters, but many are actually members of a single category; the Djinn. The Djinn were created by Allah from 'smokeless fire' – angels are made of light, human beings of clay.

Djinns are sometimes identified with demons, but the two are not identical; some Djinn are actually good Muslims. Iblis, the Islamic Satan, may have been either an angel or a Djinn taken into Heaven as a servant, before he and his followers rebelled.

The Djinn have something in common with powerful European faerie, such as the Celtic Sidhe. They are capricious shape-shifters, with their own society existing alongside humanity but mostly invisible to human eyes.

However, the Djinn who appear most often in stories tend to be either loners or the overlords, and hence are the most tricky. That said, some of the most interesting stories revolve around encounters with lesser Djinn, who can even be accidentally killed by humans while shape-shifted into weak forms.

Djinn may be eccentric, but they can be good; Muslim Djinn undertake the Hajj, although they remain politely invisible to avoid scaring human pilgrims.

Djinn are mentioned in the Koran, and so Muslims cannot deny that they exist, although modern readers may think of them as intangible spirits. They are subject to Allah's will; like European faerie, the Djinn may be driven back by religious invocations, and when a malicious Djinni possesses a human, it may be driven out by prayer.

Although they are very powerful, Djinn have their weaknesses. In particular, when some of them made trouble for humanity, the prophet Suleiman (the Old Testament Solomon) trapped them in stone pillars or brass bottles, using the 'Seal of Solomon'.

There are a range of Djinn with varying powers and attitudes, although divisions are hazy. The least powerful are Ghls, (the origin of the 'ghouls' of fantasy RPGs), unless these are merely a race of magicians with disgusting diets. At the other end of the scale are the demonic 'Ifrit and the mighty Marid.

Many stories involve middle-power Djinn, who live alone or in small groups in wildernesses, ruins or abandoned houses, down wells, or in water cisterns.

Djinns make powerful, arbitrary plot devices – which could be something of a nuisance in games where the players like to feel in control of their own destiny. Nothing else embodies the view of Fate in *Arabian Nights* in quite the same way.

Djinns can also be manipulated, which makes them useful when setting up plot situations where PCs have to use cleverness or eloquence rather than brute force.

possible player-character types

Nobles: Members of the Persian aristocracy, royal relatives, and military commanders granted land to support themselves. Most noble characters are likely to be trained in combat, although some may be administrators.

Holy warriors: Islam promises Paradise to those who fight for the faith; a successful war could also provide booty. Thus, some fighters were volunteers. Such characters must look like religious fanatics, although they might really think about loot first.

Street kids: *Aladdin* and the *Thief of Baghdad* films feature street-urchins who rise to wealth and importance. Adventurers on this model should have dexterity, and probably some thief skills, but luck and quick wits are the real essentials.

Scholars: Learning was much admired in medieval Islam, and scholars often travelled thousands of miles between universities and courts (where they tutored young nobles). Scholars might well know something of magic.

Merchants: Silk from China, spices from the Indies, frankincense from Yemen... The Near East is a great crossroads, and the Arabs knew how to profit from this. Merchants should be bold, tactful and handy in a scuffle.

Sailors: Essential for Sinbad-style campaigns, sailors can either be merchant-adventurers who specialise in sea-born trade, or corsairs, fighting the enemies of their country or of Islam on the high seas for profit.

Foreigners: This category covers Crusaders and traders – but also slaves captured in far-off lands. Some of the latter were suspected of knowing strange and perhaps sinister foreign sorceries.

MAGICAL KNOWLEDGE: "...He had applied himself to necromancy and witchcraft, so that, after forty years' study of magic and divination, he learnt one day that among the remotest cities of China there was a city called Al-kolo-ats, and that in that city there was a vast treasure the like of which no king ever amassed..." – from *Aladdin and the Enchanted Lamp*

scenario seeds

Trade: This can be routine, but there are also high-risk, high-return speculative ventures. A caravan needs merchants, animal-handlers, and guards, and might be accompanied by wandering scholars. Even routine caravans get lost in the desert, and blunder into strange ruins...

Magical research: The *Nights* stories are full of wizards who rush off to the ends of the Earth in pursuit of ancient secrets hidden in caves or lost cities. Cautious researchers can employ guards.

War: Petty kings have feuds with their neighbours, and one thing about a belief in Fate is that it implies that the winner in such wars has a right to the prize. Aside from battles and espionage, wars can also involve delicate diplomatic negotiations.

Storytelling: Even a humble bazaar entertainer could come into contact with everyone from street thugs to passing nobles. Great kings enjoy a good story, and might generously reward something really novel. And, of course, true stories can lead into other adventures.

Court intrigue: For an intrigue-heavy, high-politics game, an entire campaign could be set in a court. PCs could be guards, court wizards, harassed officials, philosophers, slaves, scheming concubines or foreign ambassadors.

ALHAMBRA: The only part of Western Europe that Islam conquered was Spain; Muslim rule lasted until 1492 AD, although by then Muslim Granada had been reduced to a petty kingdom around its famous palace of the Alhambra.

Think sinister environments, and Cyberpunk and Call of Cthulhu spring to mind. Why not throw them together? In the first of a new series of articles, Sandy Antunes does just that.

Illustration by Lee Gibbons © arcane

THE CALL OF CYBERTHULHU

Why Cyberpunk?

Let's start by explaining why Cthulhu and Cyberpunk are meant for each other. *Call of Cthulhu* is a great game on its own, but it ties in neatly with William S Gibson's twisted visions.

Though the world of cyberpunk is dark, the Mythos is far darker, and it's up to the characters to sort through the grey miasma and decide what's true. Gone are the masquerades of an ordinary life; instead, characters begin living at the edge and can fall further.

The cyberpunk genre is all about a darker tomorrow. Everything has gone just a little bit wrong, but society hasn't quite crumbled yet. Power and control seem more important than sanity or life, and senseless violence is common.

The Mythos fits into this world seamlessly, its own corrupted nature finally matched by the surrounding human society. Still hidden behind the scenes, the various threats and cults have even more areas to hide, and even more bargaining chips to play. Both street life and corporate culture can become their pawns.

Dangers also face the Mythos, however. Their secrecy is challenged by the rampant flow of information through the 'net. Although advanced, human technology is still no equaliser to beings that literally defy reason; humans are ultimately tool makers, and the tools have gotten better. So there is a constant struggle between the growing capability of individual humans, and the overall downslide of society in the cyberpunk world. The Mythos cultures have more decadent and greedy pawns to work with, and the Investigators have fewer morals and more of desire to do damage. It about balances out.

A 'typical' cyber story will start with an innocuous lead through a newspaper, contract, or story on the street. The lead will turn darker as it's investigated, the Investigators realise they're on their own, and they'll likely get caught in a double-cross or two before they figure out the score.

Once they have a clear picture, though, they'll try and burn the threat back (either cleverly, by manipulating the media or police forces, or by charging in personally).

They'll succeed, or come close, and generally never be appreciated for it. They'll question their own motivation, consider just giving in or walking on past; at that point, a good Keeper will toss them a few extra reasons to continue, such as foreshadowing the end of even this downtrodden society. And the cycle continues.

Character Generation

The characters should be from different background, with different ultimate goals. Since there's always a war going on somewhere, ex-military veterans are a good source as both NPCs and for characters.

Middle class types (data thieves and programmers, 'riggers' who operate remote machines, and techies of all sorts) are a second class to draw from. Detectives, doctors (either legal or black market), and scientists would have likely hooks for getting involved in early Mythos investigations. Media stars and politicians are another common cyberpunk proto-hero.

The standard *Call of Cthulhu* statistics still apply, though Education can be more broadly defined and include street smarts as well as straightforward schooling.

Combat

Most new weapons are just modifications and improvements on the classic old ideas of the gun, knife, and club. 'Staff/Stick' (10%) includes stunning billy-clubs and cattle prods. 'Blackjack' (25%) refers to use of a blackjack or cosh (for rending people unconscious). 'Bite' (20%) becomes useful for people (especially pseudo-vampires) who augment themselves, as does 'Claw' (25%).

Long range weapons may be added as desired, including: 'Tasps' (20%), which are weapons that jolt to the pleasure (or, if designed, pain) centre of the brain from a distance; 'Lasers', for just about any beam weapons; and 'Launchers', a catch-all for the rocket/grenade-launcher class of weapons.

Combat in cyberpunk tends to be fast and nasty. To add more tension, characters and NPCs should have to make their 'to hit' rolls by more than the opposing dodge roll (if they are able to dodge at all). This gives a very big edge to the faster player.

Give everyone two 'actions' per combat round, usually attack plus a dodge. If they want to do anything complex (driving, fixing stuff), they can do that plus dodge at half their usual skill. Aiming would count as a complex action that takes up the entire round and half of the next (with no dodging), but that attack the next round will (dice and Keeper willing) go where the player or NPC aimed it.

Combat junkies can do all-out attacks, with no dodges but getting two attack rolls instead. By the same token, a coward can just dodge and run, and have a better chance of getting out alive.

Which brings up the idea of cover. Any non-mercenary type in combat quickly learns to keep down. Just use the percentage of the body covered as the chance that a 'hit' will miss the character and impact the terrain instead. Ducking behind a car hides about half of you, so there's a 50/50 chance even a good shot will miss you. For most people, this is a good deal better than dodging bullets out in the open.

Of course, aimed shots never hit cover, and it is difficult to get better than 50% cover. Most attempts to use cover and fight (from around a corner, for example) are worth only 20-30%. Actually trying to hide and avoid combat can push this up to 60%, and still let you keep track of what's going on.

Rigging

A rigger is a person who hooks themselves directly into a machine to use it. Through a standard socket jack, the person becomes almost one with the machine, increasing their ability and speeding their response time.

This mix of person and technology gives the rigger an edge over the manual operator. The most common use of rigging is driving; truck, motorcycle or pursuit cars in particular benefit from the options and speed of rigging.

Another big use is lab technicians and cashier clerks. It isn't glamorous, but having a wireless hookup to your work gear can really boost productivity.

Rigged items can be controlled from a distance, and if they have their own cameras, from a very great distance. Their senses are passed along to the rigger, so the rigger becomes the radar unit, the floating video camera, or the electron microscope.

In addition to gaining the intrinsic functions of the gear, riggers have a bit of programming that improves their ability to use the kit, bumping up the skills quotient. Rigging allows you two attempts to succeed at any relevant task. First, you roll against natural skill; if this fails, you roll against rigging to see if the machine/person interlink is able to force a success.

Quite simply, having a direct hookup means you don't screw up as much. This is why riggers are a very marketable commodity. You can also

The Essential Cthulhupunk:

Call of Cthulhu core rules (any edition, 5th being the latest.)
A deck of cards, and some dice.
Neuromancer, by William Gibson – the classic cyberpunk world.
Snow Crash, by Neal Stephenson – realistic yet whimsical, with a metaphysical plot.

"Despite advances in technology, most Mythos beings are just as unstoppable as before"

Recommended for Cthulhupunk: A visit to a web site using a writer's perspective: http://w3.one.net/~wronk/cybrpunk.html

Delta Green, from Pagan Publishing – sourcebook for a secret agency that fights the modern era Mythos.

Bone Dance, by Emma Bull – good cyberpunk/voodoo/ mystic mix.

Count Zero and *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, by William Gibson – finishing out his trilogy.

Mirrorshades, edited by Bruce Sterling – many different views of cyberpunk.

Max Headroom, a perfectly cyberpunk British TV series.

Blade Runner, a future-noir movie by Ridley Scott.

Akira, a mainstream post-Tokyo crash Japanese animated movie

Useful for Cthulhupunk: Many novels and movies, listed in the Alt.cyberpunk FAQ: http://bush.cs.tamu.edu/~erich/alt.cp.faq.html

Background music. Tastes differ techno, movie soundtracks, classical, and metal are equally fine. Remember the future is not a quiet place.

R.Talsorian's *Cyberpunk 2020* rulebook. Has great character generation ideas.

Chaosium's *Cthulhu Now*, for modern era weaponry.

GURPS Cthulhupunk: mostly Cyber plus Monsters, but has some good points.

try to use a piece of rigged gear even if you have almost no skill in it at all; the gear may be smarter than you.

If you don't want to pay that much attention, you can use another (single) skill while rigging, but you lose that extra 'failsafe' roll. Basically, you're letting the item cruise on autopilot while you spend your attention elsewhere. So shooting, first aid, computer library use, photography, and many other tasks are possible while rigging. But, if you fail either roll, both rolls fail (humans are not so good at multi-tasking.)

If you want to be really complex and keep many units on standby or doing routine tasks, make a rigging roll every time you try to actively use a 'standby' unit. Failure means you can't do anything until you make a rigging roll for each unit you're hooked up to.

Good quality gear is clearly an essential for a rigger. Cars with autosteer can add to your driving skill (10-20%), units with radar or IR can improve your vision, systems with implanted weapons can give you remote striking power, and alarmed units can provide early warning. While most gear is 'stock' and designed for the office rather than a war zone, Keepers can feel free to increase the tech available as characters progress.

Netrunning

A 'runner breaks into a system, gets data or runs an illicit program, then tries to get out clean. Thus the whole concept of netrunning is based on theft and guile. So, it's appropriate that we lift a few concepts from another game (Pinnacle's excellent *Deadlands* – reviewed in **arcane** 13) and hack it to fit our needs.

Netrunners have a percentile skill in 'netrunning', plus a deck of cards with both Jokers. The Keeper tells the player what the target hand is and provides an appropriate poker hand that represents the task difficulty.

A Mom & Pop computer system would fall to a bare Jack, while YoYoDyne's mainframe might require a straight flush. The netrunner has to get the target hand or better without drawing any Jokers.

The netrunner rolls against his or her skill, and draws five cards from the deck. If he misses his skill roll, he returns one card for each 10% he missed by, before he gets to look at his cards. For every 10% he beats his skill by, he can choose to draw another card, one at a time.

If the player makes the target hand or better, he succeeds. The better the hand, the better (faster, more secure) his success. If he misses the desired hand, he fails.

Most failures simply lock the 'runner out of the system until he gets a new edge (new gear, new info, stolen passcodes) to try again. He can't just leap in again, after all, since the system's marked him. In any case, the deck doesn't get reshuffled until the 'runner has a good long chance to recoup (as in vacation, or days off). This isn't so much a matter of clock time as how much pressure he's under. So as long as the scenario is in full gear, he's stuck with the deck dealt to him.

The more runs done without a good break, the greater the chance of making an error and having a Joker show up. If the player draws a Joker, his run is ended, and he's been tagged by the system. Whatever the system defence was, it got them. For the Mom & Pop case, this probably just alerts the police. For YoYoDyne, though, a Joker means Black Ice (or worse) has targeted the netrunner.

Let the player try a Luck roll to see if he can escape intact. 'Success' means that his cover's blown, his run in disarray, and police are knocking down his door – easy stuff to deal with. Blowing his Luck roll has this and more, as feedback from the system security personally targets him. Recommended is 1d6 damage, plus a sanity check and minimum 1d10 loss until the 'runner succeeds in another run of at least equal challenge (since his confidence has been shot.) Mind you, if he had a winning hand before blowing it, his run succeeded even though he didn't make it out.

Mythos Futures

Despite advances in technology, most Mythos beings are just as unstoppable as before. Mi-go never showed up on photographic films, and by extension are likely to be invisible to video or cyber-eyes. Weapons may do more damage, but most Mythos entities are still bullet-sponges when it comes to (still) primitive slugthrowers or simple nuclear weapons.

While human technology is more sophisticated, it is still millennia behind that of the Elder races. Indeed, most aliens visitors to Earth never brought gear of their own, but just improvised using local materials. Now that the local materials are more sophisticated, the things they can make are *really* scary.

Magic remains a secretive and personal art, still requiring power or sanity to work. Whether spells can be combined with computer programs is a theoretical question; in general, the 'net is a particularly interesting anomaly. Some suggest it's just another dimension for Yog-Sothoth, and perhaps it's also a border to the Dreamlands. You decide.

You can run games as Cyberthulhu, with an emphasis on the high and low tech, the social strata, and cybernetically enhanced citizens. Or you can take the Cthulhupunk route, focusing on the social decay and ambivalent morals of the new age.

Both have a different feel; the tech approach tends to start with overconfident Investigators pumped full of good intentions who quickly suffer catastrophic setbacks, but come back wiser. The punk route starts with cynics and either evolves heroes or angst-ridden corpses.

In either case, it's important to focus on the characters as much as the Mythos-driven plots; the cyberpunk genre is ultimately about alienation and the human condition.

Keep scenes strong and visual, and alternate fast pacing with brief respites. Politics and social interactions should be complex and laced with money, and cheap technology should be everywhere. Street level techies will hack up gear to make new, cool, unreliable stuff, while corporate tech will be slick and polished.

Most crimes will be seen the way speeding tickets are viewed now; it's not wrong unless you get caught. But everything has consequences: kill and you'll be targeted by the law, let live and you've gained an enemy.

And everyone has a price, even your fellow Investigators. With the Mythos, though, there are things worse than living – worse than dying, even. And in the information age, all rumours are true. Welcome to the near future.

CALL OF CTHULHU STATS FOR CYBERPUNK

The following skills, with new defaults, are useful for a cyberpunk setting.

Computer Use (from *Cthulhu Now*) (25%): required for using any computer, as computers are an integral part of society.
Computer Tech (0%): This includes both software and hardware creation and modification, for computers and cyberwear.
Netrunning (0%): Required for people who will directly link into the information 'net (ie netrunners). More on this in the main article.
Cooking/Bartending (10%): Bartending is added to Cooking to reflect characters always hanging around in bars.
Interrogation (0%): Always a useful skill, includes detecting lies.
Pharmacology (0%): Important subdivision of Medical, for the cyberpunk world. Default is 0%.
BioEngineering (0%): The equivalent of mechanical aptitude for the field of biotech, bioengineering, or genetics.
Cybernetics (0%): A mix of mechanical skill and medicine, this is required for doctors who actually install or repair cybernetics.
Mechanical/Robotics (20%): This combined skill reflects both general mechanical aptitude and ability to repair or work with the mechanical parts of cybernetics (but not the human part).
Rigging/Teleservos (10%): For people who work as 'riggers', cybernetically linked to the equipment they operate (often trucks, gun turrets, and cameras).
Heavy Machine Ops (10%): A catch-all for operating non-cybernetic heavy equipment.
Battlesuit (0%): The ability to use powered armour, exoskeletons, etc.
Urban Tracking (10%): The ability to find or follow someone in the concrete jungle.

In general, you can use technical skill to fix machines and cyberwear, and medical skills to fix people and cyberwear. Which leads us to the ever-trendy and chic hardware that people can hook up to themselves. Abilities and gear can be added directly to the character's body by spending skill points, just as with buying skills. Some popular items are listed other ideas would tend to be experimental and thus costly.

Adding tech reduces one's Sanity, because the person is losing a bit of touch with human reality. Drifting from the human standard, cybergear users are (subtly) making themselves both different from, and more than, the everyday mortal. Attitudes of superiority and overconfidence can have disastrous implications in a Cthulhu setting. The exact cost to Sanity by adding cybergear is simply one-fifth (1/5) the number of skill points you spent on the gear.

Some point costs – deduct from your initial percentage points to spend on skills – are below:

Cybernetic Eyes: 25 pts each plus 20 pts per option (IR, Telescopic, UV, microscopic, night vision). Each option adds 5-15% to Spot Hidden in the appropriate setting.
Boosted hearing: 25 pts for a stereo pair, adds +15% to Listen skill. Smell enhancement: 20 pts, +5% to Spot Hidden and +10% to Tracking.
Enhanced reflexes: cost = 20 pts for each +1 added to Dexterity.
Netrunning rig: cost = 70 pts, enables netrunning
Socket jack: cost = 10 pts, allows use of 'skill chips' as well as the ability to be linked into machinery, and is required for Rigging.
Embedded weapon: 20 points if you have a cyberlimb, 40 pts otherwise
Cybernetic limbs: arms and hands add to Str or Dex, legs to Con or Dex. Costs 20 pts/limb with no bonuses. For each +1 to a stat, add 10 pts. Limbs can't go more than +3 each.

"Crk. Fox! Come in, Fox!"
"Fox here. What is it, Peppy?"
"It's our new game, Fox! It's reviewed in the June issue of N64 Magazine!"
"Great scot! Slippy? Falco? Peppy? We must get to the newsagent without delay!"
"Right behind you, Fox. Engage!"
STARFOX 64
Reviewed, rated... and completed!
ALSO IN JUNE'S N64 MAGAZINE
● INTERNATIONAL SUPERSTAR SOCCER 64
Konami's world-beating footy game
● DOOM 64
The PC original gets a 64-bit makeover
● KILLER INSTINCT GOLD
Worth buying? Or not?
● HOW TO PLAY JAPANESE GAMES
What all those squiggles mean
N64 MAGAZINE
Issue 3 on sale Thursday, 29th May

Ki

We reached the ruined village as night was falling. Karl and I had been travelling through the forest for days. Our first thought on seeing the ruined buildings was "What did this? Will they be back?" But the stones were covered in moss and ivy, obviously long-tumbled.

Whatever had caused the destruction had come and gone a hundred years ago. Only the small temple in the centre of the village had any remnants of a roof, so we made for that, treading warily through the graveyard that surrounded it. There was something wrong about this place something I couldn't quite put my finger on. It had obviously been dead for a hundred years, and yet...

I settled Karl down in his bedroll and we ate a frugal meal. My companion's leg was healing, slowly, but it needed rest. Maybe we could stay here a few days, give it a chance to mend.

It was as I was thinking this that I felt the touch of an icy breeze on the back of my neck. I was about to say something to Karl when I saw the look of horror on his face. I turned.

Standing by the altar was a young woman in the robes of a priestess. Her cheeks were thin and sunken, her eyes hollow... and I could see the wall through her. Slowly, she drifted towards us, seeming to glide across the rubble-strewn floor. Her lips mouthed a single word silently, over and over; "Beware... beware..."

In terror, we grabbed our belongings and scrambled out into the night. But the warning came too late. Already the graves were gaping wide, their inhabitants stirring into loathsome movement, and a figure in tattered finery blocked our path, his beautiful golden mask twisted into a sardonic grin...

by Ken Walton

rchheim

The sleep of the dead is not always eternal, and love and hate can easily live forever – as our Necromancers prove...

the roleplaying magazine arcane PRESENTS KIRCHHEIM with stats for Warhammer & Elric!

Kirchheim

Note: In the following description, the NPCs are given titles rather than names – they are given names in the individual scenarios for Warhammer FRP and Elric! below.

Above the city, in the bleak and lonely hills, lies the ruins of a village.

Its buildings are overgrown with grass and scrub, its walls tumbled, the dark stones of its graveyard lean at odd angles. The road which once led to it has long been overgrown with trees and bushes. Only a madman, or someone with an over-riding need would dream of crossing this countryside, rumoured to be the haunt of strange and hostile creatures. This is the home of a little-known school for Necromancers.

The village

Most of the village is obviously a ruin. But the tiny chapel of the Lady of Healing still stands, though its altar was desecrated long ago.

Beneath the chapel is the crypt, where the worthies of the village were once laid to rest. It is here that the Necromancers of Kirchheim study in darkness, safe from the light of the sun and the prying eyes of those who would interfere with their vile practices.

Getting in

For anyone who makes it through the monster-infested forests, getting into the village is easy. Getting into the hidden crypt is less so.

The Necromancers living at Kirchheim tend to come out at night to practise their unholy rites, spending the day sleeping in the crypt, among the bones of their trade.

The temple itself is haunted by the spectre of the last priestess of the temple, which is enough to put off all but the most determined visitor. For those who have the courage to stay, finding the entrance (a stone slab in the floor which can be lifted only with difficulty) is not easy, unless the visitor has been invited.

The interior

The crypt of the temple was originally small, but has been dug deeper into the earth over the centuries by teams of zombies working tirelessly night and day.

Now it is a warren of passages, sleeping quarters and necromantic laboratories. There are storage rooms for bodies, piles of bones in corners, and everywhere the smell of death and decay hangs heavy.

The walls are of packed earth, which seeps water and worms in wet weather. The ceiling is held up with beams of rotting wood.

Learning at Kirchheim

Until recently only four people were studying at Kirchheim. But the recent attacks (see below) have led to a determined recruitment drive.

Several young wizards, seduced by promises of easy power, have come to Kirchheim, where they sleep in a large, recently dug dormitory, and are taught by the older masters there.

Many of the apprentice Necromancers had little idea of what they were getting into when the arrived, and some, appalled and disgusted by the things they have seen here, wish to leave.

But the Master has promised them that any attempt to escape will lead to them being hunted through the hills by his skeleton minions. Learning is free in Kirchheim, but only the most trusted are allowed to leave.

History of Kirchheim

The village of Kirchheim was a thriving upland settlement until the coming of the plague over a thousand years ago. Those few who didn't die immediately fled, spreading the plague to other areas until finally the hill villages of the area were no more.

The Priestess of the Lady of Healing, sworn to tend the sick, grew scared and fled her temple. When she later died of cold and hunger in the hills, her spectre returned to haunt the temple she should have remained in during her life.

The spectre knows of the Necromancers in the crypt, and will do her best to scare away visitors to prevent them coming to any harm. The Necromancers put up with her, as they find her a useful way of keeping away unwanted visitors.

Two hundred years after the plague, a young Necromancer (the Master) came to Kirchheim. He had looked through old historical records for just such a lonely site with an abundant supply of corpses for his experiments.

The Master settled in and began his researches, as well as the extension of the crypt, to make it more roomy for his purposes.

On one of his infrequent trips to the city, he recruited another like minded person to his cause (the Rival), and in this way the number of Necromancers at Kirchheim grew. On his death, the Master became a Liche, and is still Master of Kirchheim, 1,200 years later.

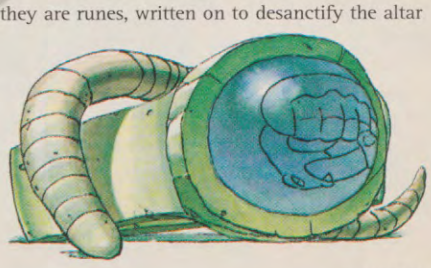
In the last few years, a group of hostile creatures (orcs, beastmen, miners looking to dig here, whatever fits your campaign world best) has moved into the nearby forest, and has tried on several occasions to take up residence in the ruins.

Their first repulsion by a force of skeletons surprised them, but only made them more determined to make Kirchheim their home. The Master has been sending the more normal – looking of his acolytes into the city to recruit new apprentices to his cause. There are presently four experienced Necromancers, and seventeen new recruits at the village.

The temple

The temple is a small building with a domed roof. The dome is cracked and lets in a thin beam of light which illuminates the dust in the interior. At the back of the temple is a statue of the Lady of Healing, her arms stretched out, a look of compassion on her face.

Just in front of her is the altar, a white marble slab. It has strange patterns on it which may just be traceries of lichen, but may just as easily be strange runes; it's difficult to tell in the half-light. Close examination with a lantern will reveal that they are runes, written on to desanctify the altar



N
W
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Temple of healing at the village of Kirchheim
The Crypt
Apprentices Quarters

Half Dug Escape Tunnel
The Masters Quarters
The Masters Lab
Body Storage
The Wizards' Lab
N
E
S
W
The Temple
The Crypt
The Apprentices Quarters
The Wizards' Quarters
The Masters Quarters
The Wizards' Laboratory
The Masters Laboratory
Body Storage

and remove the influence of the goddess.

The temple is entered through double doors, which swing loose on their hinges. Close examination of the floor will reveal many footprints in the dust, some firm and clearly defined (made by the wizards), other scuffed and dragging footprints are made by the zombies and skeletons.

A small door in the west wall leads to a staircase down into the crypt.

The crypt

This was the old village crypt, where bodies of the more prominent villagers were laid after death (the poor were buried in the churchyard outside). There are many shelves on either side of a narrow walkway, each shelf containing a coffin.

Many of the coffin lids are open; some coffins are empty, others contain dried-up bodies or skeletons. These are likely to be animated by the Necromancers in case of attack.

At the far end of the crypt, an oozy tunnel, held up with wooden pit-props, slopes gently down into the earth.

Apprentices' quarters

This cold, mud-walled chamber is where the majority of the Master's trainees sleep, in straw pallets on the floor. Many of them are unhappy and wish to leave.

There is an abortive tunnel in one corner, dug by someone trying to escape – he was discovered, and his body now serves the Master as a zombie slave.

Wizard's quarters

This room is where the Master's four colleagues, including the Rival, live. It is much better appointed than the Apprentices' Quarters, having proper beds and furniture, and wall-hangings to hide the mud walls.

The wizards are served by zombie servants, who slump slackly at the bottom of their masters' beds when not needed.

Off the sleeping quarters is a laboratory, where the four Necromancers work. It contains many grimoires, as well as dissection slabs, numerous implements for cutting up bodies, equipment for making potions and other bits an pieces.

The master's quarters

The Master's sleeping quarters are richly appointed, as befits a man who enjoyed the good life – when he was alive. Rich tapestries cover the walls, expensive carpets are on the floors, and there is a large four-poster bed in the room, as well as a wardrobe of fine clothing.

Incense burns in holders day and night to keep off the smell of earth and the stench of decay.

Off this room is the Master's Laboratory, smaller but better equipped than that used by the other wizards. No one is allowed in here, on pain of death. A side-room contains a stock of bodies, body parts and bones for use in the Master's research.

Characters

The Master of Kirchheim

The Master is a fearsome sight indeed. His rotting body, held together by vile sorceries, is a mass of putrid and decaying flesh. His eyes burn with an unholy light, and his face is split by the rictus grin of a skeleton.

Despite this, the Master dresses in the finest clothes available from the city, preferring deep blue velvets and silks. In his youth, before he turned to necromancy, the Master was a dandy.

He is utterly ruthless with his acolytes, thinking nothing of killing one who has annoyed him and reanimating the corpse. He has a familiar in the form of a goat skull on the skeleton of a monkey, by the name of Hack. Everyone in Kirchheim is terrified of it.

Some of his colleagues have urged him to use his great power to raise a great undead army and march on the city, but this doesn't interest him.

Instead, he is obsessed with regaining his lost good looks so that he can once more mingle in normal society and charm the ladies of fashion. So far, he has had no success at all. Most of the time, the Master wears the Mask described below.

Hack

Hack is the Master's familiar. It takes the form of a monkey skeleton with a goat's skull on it, and is armed with a rusty meat cleaver.

Hack will fight for its master, leaving him to concentrate on spell-casting. It will not go more than 10 yards from the, and if it finds itself more than that distance away, will fight mindlessly to return.

Hack is very loyal to the Master, sitting by his head when he sleeps to protect him, and has an unpleasant vicious streak – anyone who so much as disagrees with the Master is likely to find the tiny skeletal thing coming at him waving its cleaver.

Usually, the Master restrains it with a word, but sometimes he lets it have its way, and the results are not pleasant.

The mask

When he ventures out into the world, the Master wears a mask made of gold, with red jewel-like eyes. The mask shows the face of a handsome young man, an image of the Master himself when he was young.

The mask is magical and has the ability to move its features with the expressions of the Master, just like a living face. On top of that, it gives the Master the ability to see in the dark, and can fire fireballs out of its eyes. The mask is, in fact, inhabited by a minor demon, bound into the mask by the Master some centuries ago.

If the master is killed, the demon will return to its own plane, and the mask will become just an inert piece of gold – worth a lot of money, but not at all magical.

The Rival

The Rival is one of the Master's colleagues at Kirchheim. He is over a hundred years old, though arcane spells and potions keep him alive. He is a small, withered old man, not at all fearsome-looking, though his frail appearance belies a sinewy strength and a great knowledge of spells.

He has learned everything he knows about Necromancy from the Master. At one time, he worshipped the Liche, but now he is starting to get restless and wants to rule Kircheim himself. He would like to make himself a Liche, but the Master refuses to teach him the necessary spell, saying that he is not ready for it.

The Rival's great fear is that he will die before he has learned that particular secret, and that his body will become one of the Master's undead servants. If he thinks he can get away with it, he will pass himself off as an escaped victim of the Master and recruit the PCs to help him kill him, then turn on them when they have served their purpose.

The priestess

The spectre of the priestess of the temple takes the form of a sorrowful young woman in priestess' robes.

Sometimes she can be heard sobbing for the dead of the village even when she cannot be seen. While she is obviously a somewhat scary apparition, she is not evil – she will do her best to prevent people entering the crypt, because people who go there are killed by the Necromancers.

One of our wizards is missing

An adventure for Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay.

The following adventure assumes that Kirchheim is in the Skaag Hills, west of Altdorf, but it could easily be placed anywhere in the wilderness near a large city. The enemies of Kirchheim in this case will be the Beastmen of the Drak Wald Forest.

A young wizard, Dieter Branbach, has gone missing from his home in Altdorf. His parents are wealthy merchants who doted on their son, and are worried about his disappearance. The PCs are hired to try and find him.

Asking around at the University, where Dieter was studying magic, they discover that he was seen talking to a sinister stranger with a pale, thin face, on several occasions. This was one of Master Grabe's apprentices, a Level 1 Necromancer called Hans Scrofmeier, whose job is to recruit new apprentices for Kirchheim.

Further investigation will reveal that Dieter and his strange companion were seen leaving town on a river boat bound for Weissbruck, on the edge of the Skaag Hills. In Weissbruck, they will learn that two strangers, one of them rather sinister, and the other somewhat nervous, were seen in the town. They hired pack horses and headed into the Hills.

More questions will reveal that the pale-faced stranger has been seen in Weissbruck before, with young men and women. He tells locals he lives on a remote farm, but the villagers are suspicious and mutter about Chaos and evil creatures in the forest.

The PCs must follow his trail up into the Skaag Hills (preferably with winter coming on, for maximum atmosphere), risking Beastmen and Mutant attacks.

What will they find when they get to the village? Deiter may have joined the Necromancers and does not want to return; if so, what will the PCs do then? On the other hand, he may be being held prisoner. If so, can the PCs rescue him? As a third possibility, he may have just escaped from Kirchheim and may stumble across the PCs on the moors, being hunted by a band of skeletons led by one of the lesser Necromancers of the college.

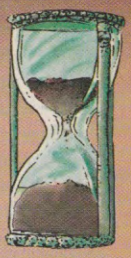
If the PCs come across the college, they may well decide that they can't manage to get rid of it by themselves, and may return to Weissbruck to inform the authorities.

But the local authorities are less than keen to take on a powerful Necromancer and his minions; he hasn't bothered them so far, and they don't want to attract his attention. The PCs will get little help in Weissbruck, and may decide to return to Altdorf, where they could gain more support, from Witch-Hunters and the Temple of Morr.

The Imperial government would probably send a force to sort out the Necromancers. But the worthy Burghers of Weissbruck don't like this idea at all; Imperial troops stationed in their town, causing trouble, requisitioning things left, right and centre.

No, far better if the PCs were to quietly disappear on their way back to Altdorf, so the authorities don't get to hear about Kirchheim.

WARHAMMER FANTASY ROLEPLAY STATS



THE MASTER (MASTER JOHANN GRABE)

Male, Liche, Necromancer 4th Level

M	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Dex	Ld	Int	Cl	WP	Fel
4	41	25	4	4	23	60	4	43	89	89	89	89	-

Age: approx 2,150 Alignment: Evil

SKILLS Arcane Language - Elvish, Arcane Language - Magic, Arcane Language - Necromancy, Cast Spells - Petty Magic, Battle Magic (Levels 1,2,3,4), Necromantic Battle Magic (Levels 1,2,3,4), Demon Lore, Evaluate, Herb Lore, Identify Magical Artefact, Identify Plants, Identify Undead, Magic Sense, Magical Awareness, Manufacture Drugs, Manufacture Potions, Manufacture Scrolls, Meditation, Prepare Poison, Read/Write, Secret Language, Classical, Rune Lore, Scroll Lore

SPECIAL RULES
See WFRP, p.249-50

POSSESSIONS
Fashionable clothing, horrible smell, Wand of Jet, Warrior Familiar.

PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAITS
Liches cause fear and terror in living creatures; they are immune to psychological problems themselves.

SPELLS
Petty Magic: Curse, Magic Alarm, Marsh Lights.
Battle Magic Level 1: Cause Animosity, Steal Mind, Wind Blast.
Battle Magic Level 2: Cause Frenzy, Cause Hatred, Cause Panic, Lightning Bolt.
Battle Magic Level 3: Cause Fear, Magic Bridge.
Battle Magic Level 4: Aura of Invulnerability, Change Allegiance, Strength of Mind.
Necromantic Battle Magic Level 1: Hand of Death, Summon Skeleton Champion,Summon Skeletons.
Necromantic Battle Magic Level 2: Control Undead, Extend Control, Hand of Dust, Stop Instability, Summon Skeleton Minor Hero.
Necromantic Battle Magic Level 3: Life in Death, Raise Dead, Summon Skeleton Horde.
Necromantic Battle Magic Level 4: Curse of Undeath, Total Control, Wind of Death.

HACK (WARRIOR FAMILIAR)

M	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Dex	Ld	Int	Cl	WP	Fel
4	50	10	4	4	10	60	2	60	60	20	70	30	10

The stats above include the familiar's cleaver. There will be more information on Warrior Familiars in the forthcoming Realms of Sorcery from Hogshead Publishing.

THE MASK (DEMON FASHION ACCESSORY)

M	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Dex	Ld	Int	Cl	WP	Fel
0	0	0	0	6	12	60	2	0	0	70	99	99	0

MPs: 14
The mask allows Grabe to see in the dark, and can cast 2 Fireball spells per round (one from each eye)

THE RIVAL (KURT VOGELBURGER)

Human, Male, Necromancer

M	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Dex	Ld	Int	Cl	WP	Fel
4	41	25	4	4	8	50	2	43	69	69	69	79	23

Age: 103 Alignment: Evil

SKILLS Arcane Language - Elvish, Arcane Language - Magic, Arcane Language -Necromancy, Cast Spells - Petty Magic, Battle Magic (Levels 1,2), Necromantic Battle Magic (Levels 1,2,3,4), Demon Lore, Evaluate, Herb Lore, Identify Plants, Identify Undead, Magic Sense, Magical Awareness, Manufacture Drugs, Meditation, Prepare Poison, Read/Write, Secret Language, Classical, Rune Lore, Scroll Lore

Petty Magic: Glowing Light, Magic Flame, Open, Sleep.
Battle Magic Level 1: Fire Ball, Flight
Battle Magic Level 2: Aura of Protection, Cause Hatred, Mystic Mist.
Necromantic Battle Magic L1: Destroy Undead, Hand of Death, Summon Skeletons, Zone of Life.
Necromantic Battle Magic L2: Control Undead, Hand of Dust, Summon Skeleton Minor Hero.
Necromantic Battle Magic Level 3: Raise Dead, Wind of Death.

THE PRIESTESS (GRETA MARBACH)

Spectre, ex-priestess of Shallya Use standard Spectre profile, WFRP p.253

Love beyond death

An adventure for Elric!.

The following adventure assumes Kirchheim is in the Central Highlands of Ilmiora, near Oberlorn (see Atlas of the Young Kingdoms Vol. 1: The Northern Continent).

Two thousand years ago a young Melnibonéan sorcerer, Dyravaar Slont (the Master) fell in love with one of his human slaves.

Pressured by gossip and disapproval at court, Slont fled the Dragon Isle with his beloved, and went to live in a remote province of the empire in what is today Ilmiora. They made a home for themselves in a human village and were happy for a while.

Then Slort's father died, and he was forced to return to Melniboné to take over the family estates. His betrothed was heavily pregnant, and she stayed in the village, knowing her lover would return to her. Unfortunately, plague came to the Central Highlands, and she was killed, though a friend took her baby and fled south away from the plague area.

When Slont heard this, he was grief stricken. He studied Necromancy, and returned to the village to try to resurrect his dead beloved. But though her body was there, her spirit had fled, dissolved into Limbo. Slont continued with his researches, calling up the spirits of anyone who had any memory of his wife, so he could keep her memory alive.

Eventually he learned what had happened to his son, but by this time he had fathered a long string of descendants, and was long dead.

He became obsessed with the idea that if he could collect the spirits of his son's descendants, he could in some way recreate the spirit of his beloved and use it to animate her corpse.

Slont has recruited lots of necromancers to help this cause, and is hunting down anyone (or the body of anyone) who is related to his dead son.

Slort is not altogether an unsympathetic character – he is not evil, just obsessed to the point of madness. The PCs may be able to talk their way into his good books.

He has managed to collect the spirits of all but one of the descendents of his son. Only one remains, a little orphan girl, whose parents were captured and killed by Slort a few years ago.

Slort has ordered Saltos Viluus (the Rival) to kidnap the child, who has been adopted by a rich and influential merchant family in Oberlorn. Viluus recruits the PCs, claiming that the girl's parents are still alive and want their daughter back.

The PCs may be suspicious, and if so, Viluus will blurt out a version of the truth – if Slort doesn't get the girl the easy way, he will send an army of undead into Oberlorn to fetch her. He then tries to persuade the PCs to help him destroy Slort, intending to turn on them when Slort is dead.

Alternatively, if they talk to Slort, he will be very persuasive; if they bring him the girl, he will leave the area, and return his undead minions to dust – he will no longer be a threat to the city. What's the life of one small girl against that of a city?

ELRIC! STATS

THE MASTER (DYRAVAAR SLONT)

Melnibonéan Male

STR	CON	SIZ	INT	POW	DEX	APP	HP
12	14	13	22	25	9	1	16

Age: approx 2150, Chaos 87, Balance 31, Law 21

Broadsword 101% damage 1D8+1+1D4
Damage Bonus: +1D4
Armour: none

SKILLS Art (Conversation) 78%, Bargain 65%, Common 96%, Dodge 74%, Evaluate 82%, Fast Talk 101%, High Melnibonéan 101%, Low Melnibonéan 101%, Million Spheres 56%, Natural World 76%, Physik 87%, Potions 87%, Scent/Taste 69%, Scribe 72%, Smile Ironically 85%, Young Kingdoms 55%

SPELLS Animate Skeleton, Army of the Dead, Beckoning Earth, Brazier of Power, Chain of Being, Chardros' Eternal Gift, Create Abomination, Lure Spirit/Ghost, Necrology, Raise Mummy, Raise Zombie, Speak with the Dead, Spirit Bind, Stench of the Grave, Summon Demon, Summon Ghoul, Witch Sight.

HACK, ABOMINATION

STR	CON	SIZ	INT	POW	DEX	APP	HP
11	9	3	8	7	13	1	10

Damage Bonus: 0
Cleaver 150%, damage 1D6
Armour: body deflects 30 points
(see The Bronze Grimoire, p.25)

DYRAVAAR SLONT'S LESSER DEMON MASK

Ornate golden mask with ruby eyes, demon within INT 11 POW 13
ABILITIES Burn, Heat Sight **Need:** to be worn for at least an hour a day.

THE RIVAL (SALTOS VILUUS)

STR	CON	SIZ	INT	POW	DEX	APP	HP
8	11	11	16	19	12	9	12

Age 103, Necromancer. Chaos 87, Balance 3, Law 7

Damage Bonus: 0
Short Sword 60%, Damage 1D6+1
Armour: 1D6-1 helmet off, Soft leather hidden under robes

SKILLS Bargain 75%, Common 96%, Conceal Object 45%, Disguise 78%, Fast Talk 97%, High Melnibonéan 55%, Insight 65%, Million Spheres 23%, Natural World 56%, Oratory 76%, Potions 66%, Ride 55%, Scribe 87%, Young Kingdoms 45%

SPELLS Animate Skeleton, Beckoning Earth, Bonds Unbreakable, Buzzard Eyes, Cloak of Cran Liret, Grome's Grasp, Hell's Armour, Lure Spirit/Ghost, Moonrise, Necrology, Possession, Raise Zombie, Rat Vision, Spirit Barrier, Summon Demon, Witch Sight

The Priestess (Serafina Kelos), spectre, *ex-Priestess of Mirath Use standard ghost profile, The Bronze Grimoire, p.25-27*

OTHER IDEAS WFRP:

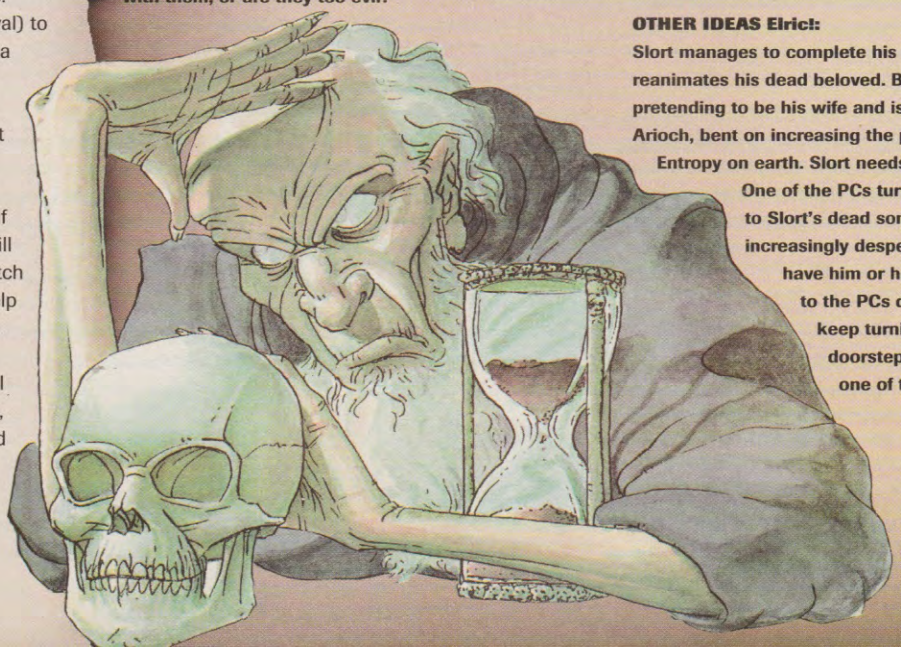
The Necromancers are all that stand in the way of an army of beastmen and the town of Weissbruck. Can the PCs forge an alliance with them, or are they too evil?

One of the PCs is a wizard who is recruited with tales of the good education available at Kirchheim. When the truth is discovered, can she escape?

OTHER IDEAS Elric!:

Slort manages to complete his ritual, and reanimates his dead beloved. But the spirit is only pretending to be his wife and is actually an avatar of Arioch, bent on increasing the power of the Lords of Entropy on earth. Slort needs help quickly!

One of the PCs turns out to be related to Slort's dead son. Slort makes increasingly desperate attempts to have him or her kidnapped. What to the PCs do when zombies keep turning up on the doorstep, trying to carry off one of their number?



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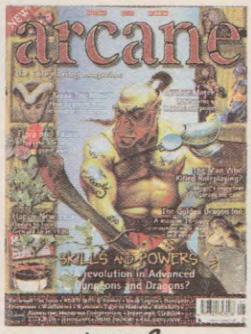

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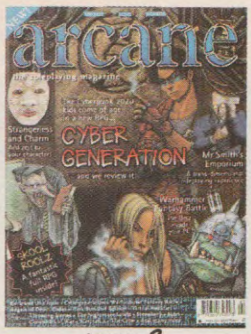

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Issue 6 explained why the Christian Right wants to ban RPGs, reviewed *Netrunner* and gave you a Keep in the Encounter pull-out.

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Issue 8 discussed mysticism in games, offered free trials on 20 PBM games, reviewed *Alliances* and went into Space in the Encounter.

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Issue 11 looked at cyberpunk, reported from GenCon and took you to the Circus in the Encounter. We also reviewed *Fading Suns*.

Issue 12 debated the use of politics in RPGs, climbed aboard the Pirate Ship in the Encounter and reviewed a revised *Star Wars* RPG.

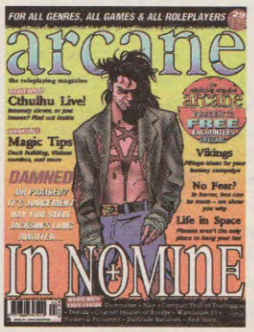
Issue 13 is lucky for any budding referees, first time LARPers and *Deadlands* or *Mirage* players. We visit Starkmoor Hall in the Encounter.

Issue 14 had the readers' 50 top RPGs, a deep-space probe in Encounters, a selection of *Mirage* combos and reviewed *Settlers*.

Issue 15 investigated conspiracy campaigns, placed its bets on the MegaCasino in Encounters, and reviewed *Ars Magica*.

Issue 16 published John Tynes' new RPG *Puppetland*, eyed the Superhero genre and reviewed 28 new releases. The Encounter was in the monastery.

Issue 17 reviewed *Visions* and *Masks of Nyarlathotep*, examined Celtic culture and went to the ancient library in the Encounter.



Issue 18 reviewed *In Nomine*, explored Viking culture, and looked at monsters in horror games. The Encounter was on an airship.

Issue 19 how to get invaded by things from outer space. Free RPG - Forgotten Futures. The encounter was in a Chinese restaurant

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"Give each player a moment to shine – make them feel that they're involved."

Pros at cons

Running a game at a convention isn't all hustle, bustle, toil and trouble. Get it sorted beforehand and you'll have a ball. Chris Pramas *gets you started.*

Check out arcane's listing of conventions each issue. It's not everyone who can stump up the airfare to get to GenCon, but there are numerous (albeit smaller) British conventions that you can attend.

Over the years at GenCon I've watched GM after GM make the same mistakes. When I started running a tournament of my own at GenCon, I tried to implement what I had learned.

My game, an *Ars Magica* tourney chronicling the continuing adventures of the covenant of Castellum Collis, ran for four years and was, I think, a great success.

What follows are some suggestions, solidly based on my own experiences, for how to run a successful roleplaying session at a gaming convention.

The Basics

The first thing you need to do is pick a game system, ideally one you know well. Otherwise, you spend precious time looking up rules, or worse, you end being dictated to by the rules lawyers who infest just about every con.

Some games are designed for quick character generation and can be successfully run at cons without pre-generated characters. *Over the Edge*, *Feng Shui* and *Star Wars* are all games of this type.

After you've picked your system, decide what kind of game you're going to run. Will it be a single round game or a multi-round tourney? Do you plan to make this a continuing series or is it a one-off?

Both of these decisions will affect the way you develop your game so it's good to make them at the outset.

Sit down and come up with the basic plot-line for the game. You needn't hammer out the nitty gritty at this stage, but give some thought to what you're trying to do. Is your game going to be political intrigue, a classic dungeon crawl, something experimental, or all of the above?

You should also decide how many players you'd like to have in the game. Commonly, you'll have up to eight, but many cons let you decide. I've found that six is a good number. More than that and the game becomes more like babysitting than game-mastering.

The Characters

Many GMs leave character creation up to the players. This is usually a big mistake for a couple of reasons. First, spending an hour or more of your slot mucking around with characters is a big waste of time. People go to cons to play.

Creating the characters beforehand lets you tailor the plot to suit them. You can write encounters specifically to play up the strengths and weaknesses of particular characters, which really serves to engage the players and to get them to identify with their characters. It also makes things easier on you, since you'll know exactly what each character can and cannot do.

An important thing to remember when designing the characters is that they are not simply a bunch of stats. There's nothing worse than being handed a sheet of paper covered with numbers and then being told to roleplay. Try to create a history and provide notes for each character, otherwise you won't get any meaningful interaction.

The first year is usually the worst, since you have to come up with six to ten characters that are interesting and playable. After that, you can tweak and update them in the wake of experience.

Another thing to consider when making characters is whether they'll be fun to play. You should try to give everyone a character who is unique in some way. It's unfair on a player if they're given a character who's useless.

Writing the Game

Now comes the really hard part. You can have the best characters in the world, but people are still going to hate your game if the adventure itself is boring.

There's not enough time to try to answer the age old question "what makes a good adventure," but there are a few things you should try to bear in mind when designing a scenario for a con.

First, you should try to design your game so that it engages all of the players and their characters. Games that focus on one or two characters over all the others tend to marginalise the other players and make them feel unimportant.

An excellent way to avoid this problem is to try to plan scenes for each of the characters. These are encounters specifically designed for individuals, yet another bonus of using pre-gens.

Giving each player a moment to shine makes them feel that their character is really involved in what's going on. These scenes are most often dramatic situations, but can just as easily be based around a character's special abilities or unique area of knowledge.

Another thing to remember is that you're working with a time limit. At GenCon, this is usually four hours. Whatever the limit, you must be sure that your you can finish the game in the allotted time because you can't just get everyone together the next week. If you want to send your players home with a gaming experience they will remember, there really must be a sense of closure to the whole thing.

One trick that I've used to great effect is to design an optional encounter. This is a scene you can use towards the end of an adventure that is not crucial to its

outcome. If the game is proceeding as planned, use the encounter as normal. If things are running late, skip it and get to the climax as soon as possible.

If you're planning on running a multi-round tourney, you also need to consider the structure of each round. Often, GM's get carried away with the grand plan, and give little thought to how each individual round plays.

This is great if you advance to the final but most players won't. You have to make sure that each round is fun to play in its own right.

The characters should have the opportunity to complete a task that's important in the emerging plot. They'll feel as if they made a difference, accomplishing something even if they don't get to see how the whole story plays out.

Character equality matters. I remember playing a *Call of Cthulhu* game in which I played a high school student. About an hour in I realised that two of the characters were in fact professors who specialised in magic and were casting spells. They were better at everything than the rest of us. This is not fun.

Running the Game

All right, now you've designed the game and you've got the characters. If you're lucky, you've even had time to playtest it with your regular gaming group.

Now you're at the con with six hungry players sitting before you. You think you're ready for every contingency and the next thing you know your game has been ruined. What went wrong?

Running a game for a group of people who are not only new to you but also strangers to each other can be quite a challenge. The one thing you can't plan for is the type of players you're going to get.

A good reason for running multi-round tournaments is that you can weed out the disruptive elements and ensure a quality group for the final. You're not always going to have that luxury, however, and there are those first rounds to get through.

In my experience, you need to be on the lookout for three types of players who can ruin your game.

First, there's the type I like to call the know-it-all. This category includes the dreaded rules lawyers, as well as those who consider themselves to be experts in the background and history of the particular game.

There's nothing wrong with knowing the rules and background of a game. But these people will interrupt you to quote rules, start lengthy arguments on your interpretation of a rule or part of the games canon, and generally be a pain in the neck.

Second, there's the type I call the needy-children. These players just have to be the centre of attention all the time. They often will talk louder than everyone else and attempt to browbeat the other players into following their lead. They try to have their characters involved in every part of the adventure, even if their character is somewhere else. They try to butt in on other characters scenes and steal them. In short, they are rude and inconsiderate. As a GM, you need to be aware of how a needy-child can dominate a game.

Lastly, there are those I simply call idiots. These clowns show no consideration for all the work you've put into designing an adventure. They have their character pick fights for no reason, insult major NPC's no matter the circumstances, and run off on their own with blatant disregard to the actual plot of the adventure.

If you don't get them to behave early on, your game is doomed. It's best to simply ask them to leave, since the tight schedule of most cons does not allow for the years of therapy that these people need.

Don't have 'favourite players'. In one Stormbringer game I played, the GM loaded one character down with potent magic items and then let his player utterly dominate the game. Then, when a friend and I plotted against this needy-child for a lack anything else to do in the adventure, the GM simply told him. We left.

But while it is easy to blame the players for disastrous games, sometimes the fault lies squarely at the GM's feet. Apart from issues of preparation and style, the GM needs to maintain a sense of fairness and equity throughout the game. Try to give everyone a chance to participate, and stay away from the deadly, fun-killing game of favourites.

No one likes to be snubbed. Above all, do not let one player kill or incapacitate other characters. This usually results in the dead characters' players leaving the game and feeling ripped-off.

Wrapping Up

One way or the other, with the thrill of victory or the agony of defeat, your game will end. While you may be tempted to rest on you laurels (or knock back a fifth of Scotch depending on just how the game went), there are a few tasks that still need doing.

The most immediate of these is to determine the 'winner' of the game. This is not necessary at all cons, but many provide gift certificates for each event and its your job as GM to hand them out.

How you do this is entirely up to you and in many ways depends on your temperament. Some people refuse to play the winner/loser game at all, and simply have the players dice off for the prize. I've even seen it done before the game starts, killing the spirit of competition in its crib.

Many GM's go with the prize concept to encourage better roleplaying, using it as a kind of carrot and stick device to get better performances out of their players.

Prizes are then awarded by either popular vote or GM fiat. There are problems with both methods (popular voting usually rewards the blatant over the subtle, while GM fiat is by its very nature be extremely arbitrary).

Personally, I tried to fall somewhere in the middle. I would let the players vote but reserved the final judgment for myself. I usually found that my judgment and that of the players coincided nicely, but sometimes I did overrule the voting if I thought someone was really being overlooked.

Again, there's no right way to do this, but it can become an issue and it's best to plan ahead. If you're planning on running a sequel to your event the following year, sit down and write out how the adventure played out and what key actions the players took.

Believe me, you'll be glad you did nine months later, when you're working on the next adventure and you can't remember what happened the year before. I made that mistake once, but I made sure I never did it again.

Repeat players, a sure testimony that you're doing something right, expect a sense of continuity between years. That is, after all, one of things that brings them back to your gaming table time after time.

Final Thoughts

After reading this article, you may well think all of this is too much bother. However, there's nothing quite like the feeling you get after a great session. When you get the right group of players and they click with your story, it's a beautiful thing.

I'll never forget the final of the third year of my tournament. The game went extremely well and I was quite pleased.

Afterwards, one of the players came up to me and said, "That's the best game I've ever played at GenCon." And that's what makes it all worthwhile.

"Repeat players are a sure testimony that you're doing things right"

DECK OF

PART 3: THE BURN DECK

The oldest deck engine is the Direct Damage deck. But what will happen now that 5th Edition Magic is here and Lightning Bolts aren't? Jason Nicoll takes a look.

Works for him
Emmanuel Vernay recently won a Pro Tour Qualifier event in Amsterdam using a burn deck. Lightning Bolts and Incinerates figured heavily, along with other Burn deck staples like Pillage and Hammer of Bogarden. See News in arcane 19 for more details.

The Burn Engine is perhaps the oldest of all the deck engines. It was so efficient and abusive in the early days of Magic that it helped to define the limit of four (non-basic land) cards per deck.

In its purest form it consists of nothing other than Direct Damage spells and Land. It is one of the easiest deck engines to get to grips with due to its simplicity and honesty.

The Direct Damage spells (spells that can damage either creatures or players) that make up the bulk of a Burn deck are mainly, though not exclusively, Red in nature.

The aligned colours of Green and Black have some degree of Direct Damage, but the non-aligned colours of White and Blue have no forms of Direct Damage in the Type II environment at all.

It's interesting to note how the Direct Damage from Red influences its two aligned colours. Green's Direct Damage spells such as Hurricane have very specialist use, whereas the excellent Drain Life and Pestilence require such a strong commitment to Black that they rarely get used outside of mono Black decks.

It is for this reasons that most people assume that you are referring to Red when discussing either Direct Damage or Burn decks.

Burn decks need to be pretty versatile, and have the following capabilities:

Land Removal
Artifact Removal
Varied Direct Damage
Mass Creature reset
Enchantment Removal

Red has always had the ability to destroy Land (Stone Rain) and Artifacts (Shatter). With Alliances, Red gained more Artifact removal as well as the multi-functional Pillage.

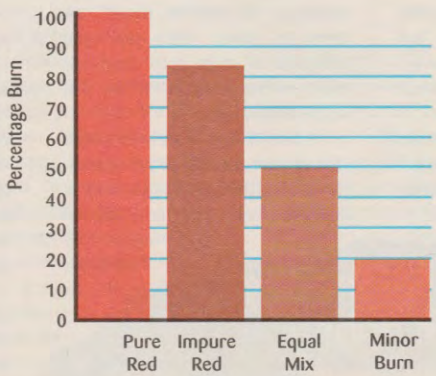
Although Red tends to lose card economy when using normal Direct Damage against Weenie Decks and BFC Decks it has some mass creature destruction spells. Nevinyrral's Disk, Earthquake, Pyroclasm, as well as Rock slide and Tremor, can help keep the hordes at bay.

Red and Dead

Red's Achilles' Heel is its lack of ways to deal with Enchantments, specifically COP Red, which can shut down a pure Red deck instantly.

Sure, there are other hoser cards out there such as Justice, Conversion and Honorable Passage, but nothing ruins a Burn Deck's day more than COP Red. Players must weigh up the threat of COP Red in their local environment and the different measures required to deal with it before deciding the degree of Burn's purity. COP Red is the weak spot that has lead to the segmentation of the Burn deck into four different camps:

Pure Red
Impure Red
Equal Mix
Minor Burn



Pure Red

Burn decks tend to do well when the metagame creates a suitable environment for them. For example, the Sligh deck and the all-Red Decks that appeared towards the tail end of last year were created to destroy Necro decks.

These pure decks were also able to take advantage of the fact that the sideboards of White decks contained very little if any anti-Red cards due to the presence of the Prison (requiring anti-Artifact) and Necro (requiring anti-Black). With any fresh environment though, expect to see sideboards containing the COP and other anti-red spells.

Red has always had several ways of dealing with the COP without diluting itself and reducing the purity of the deck through the introduction of another colour. These are the antidotes to a COP:

Nevinyrral's Disk Although the Disk is slow and vulnerable to being Disenchanted, it is nevertheless an excellent card for removing any annoying permanents, especially COP Red.

Anarchy This was an excellent sideboard card against White, as it destroyed all White Permanents in play. It was faster than the Disk and couldn't be Disenchanted.

However, players were always wary of using it when facing a Blue and White deck, as a Sleighted Anarchy is no picnic. Unfortunately, Anarchy was not reprinted in 5th Edition and is therefore no longer Type II legal.

Flashfires In my opinion, this sideboard card is not as good as Anarchy, but is worthy of mention as it is still Type II legal and acts as a one sided Armageddon against White.

Flashfires is especially useful for slowing

ENGINES

your opponent down as well as denying him the mana for COP Red. However, its effectiveness is greatly reduced when facing a multicoloured deck.

Manabarbs Unfortunately, this has become a victim of the recent changes to Damage Prevention Timing. It is now possible to tap just one land to prevent damage with the COP and then tap any other land in response during the damage prevention step.

Unfortunately, Red seems to be the popular colour of choice at the moment and has already pushed the metagame into an Anti Burn era with COP Red and/or Hydroblast in nearly every sideboard. The Pure Red Burn deck is therefore a very risky deck type and not one I would recommend at the moment.

The Evolution of Red

It seems that Wizards of the Coast are weakening the cards that require a minor investment in Red (such as the removal of the Bolt from Type II play) whilst simultaneously strengthening the cards that require a major investment.

This obviously fits in with their balancing of the colours and is an attempt to give Red a greater depth to its personality and move into areas other than straight burn.

The loss of the Lightning Bolt will obviously affect the colour of Red (so to speak). Obviously it will reduce the number of 'Bolts' from 8 to 4 (Guerrilla Tactics is a bit too specialist) and will therefore reduce the attraction of Red as a Minor addition to any deck.

However, its loss should not affect Pure Burn decks and Impure Burn Decks, as red still has some excellent offensive cards such as the Hammer of Bogarden if a stronger commitment is made.

These changes to Red's personality are very exciting as it is beginning to get some excellent creatures such as the powerful Viashino Sandstalker, Wildfire Emissary, Ogre Enforcer, Hulking Cyclops and the useful Dwarven Miner, Goblin Tinkerer and Gorilla Shaman.

It has also been treated to some very interesting game altering cards such as Final Fortune, Relentless Assault and Illicit Auction. I hope the trend continues and that Weatherlight and future expansions will bring us even more depth.

Impure Red - Minor Addition

As the name suggests, Impure Red decks have a smattering of between 10% to 20% of another colour (usually Green or White) to help improve their performance and deal with enchantments. Black increases the offensive and disruptive nature of the deck but doesn't offer any solutions to the COP.

However, with multiple coloured damage sources, the effectiveness of a particular COP is greatly reduced. Blue requires too much commitment to it before its counter capabilities become useful, which leaves Green and White.

White has always been one of the most often used support colours due mainly to Disenchant, Swords to Plowshares and Balance. However, with the removal of Swords to Plowshares and Balance form the Type II play environment, White's power base and supportive nature has been greatly reduced. This is despite the presence of the excellent but more specialist White reset cards of Armageddon and Wrath of (thank) God.

Green, however, has Enchantment removal capabilities too. Green lends itself very well as a support colour to Red because of the tighter mana ratios (Karplusan Forest) that aligned colours have, as well as the complementary offensive nature of cards such as Stormbind and Hurricane. The investment in Green is negligible.

Apart from helping with Enchantment removal, the addition of Green helps to increase the deck's efficiency against weenie and BFC decks through the excellent Savage Twister.

Shared Deck Engine

A shared Deck Engine is the name given when a Deck contains two or more Deck Engines in roughly equal proportions. For example, a Red/Green Deck that used a lot of Greens BFC's with double green Casting Cost (see last issue of **arcane** for details of BFC decks) would be classed as a Shared Deck Engine.

A shared Deck Engine typically breaks the rules of having one major and one minor colour in favour of a major commitment to its two colours.

In the present environment, the most common Shared Burn Deck Engine is the Counter Hammer Deck which requires both two Red Mana sources as well as two Blue Mana sources for many of its spells.

The only permanents in this deck are the four Binding Grasps and the four Frenetic Efreets, both of which work quite well with the Nevinyrral's Disk.

Obviously, there are other cards that would work well in a Counter Post deck such as the Mana Diamonds. These would help the deck to reach its Mana Curve of four mana a little bit quicker.

However, the Disk is antagonistic to most permanents including the Diamonds and would only serve to make the deck more difficult to handle easily.

Minor Theme

The Burn as a Minor theme is very familiar to many players and is used in more decks types than is possible to list in this article. It typically involves the addition of Lightning Bolts, Incinerates and Fireballs and as such doesn't strictly qualify as using the Burn Engine. We'll come back to Burn as a minor theme in future Deck Engine articles.

The Metagame

Red has always been a favourite with the tournament community. It is very much a victim of the metagame due to its impressive Direct Damage offence yet its incredibly poor defence against enchantments and COP Red.

An example of how the metagame aided Red was the very successful Pure Burn Decks used by Ollie Schneider and the London crew towards the end of 1996.

The pure decks were incredibly successful and won many tournaments, although I suspect that they would be less effective now that sideboards have been tweaked and players are more prepared for them.

By the time you read this, Red may well have have once again fallen from grace, as the Mono Blue and Blue White Control Decks that look likely to emerge after 5th will have so many ways of dealing with Red.

Some examples of the new cards include:

Honorable Passage This card is cheap, has a low commitment to White and gives White a form of Direct Damage. It will cause Red players to rethink the casting of that game, winning 15 point Fireball more than Deflection ever did.

Greater Realms of Preservation Well, this card has the ability to shut down both Black and Red simultaneously. It is a highly economic sideboard card despite its high White commitment and will almost certainly make it to most players' sideboards.

RED/GREEN BURN DECK

LAND
4 Quicksand
2 Dormant Volcano
2 Thawing Glaciers
4 Forest
3 Karplusan Forest
12 Mountain

ARTIFACTS
2 Nevinyrral's Disk

SPELLS
4 Earthquake
4 Incinerate
4 Fireball
3 Hammer of Bogarden
2 Fireblast
4 Pillage
2 Tranquil Domain
1 Savage Twister

CREATURES
4 Viashino Sandstalker
3 Wildfire Emissary

SIDEBOARD
3 City of Solitude
2 Tranquil Domain
2 Savage Twister
4 Pyroblast
2 Nevinyrral's Disk
2 Stone Rain

THE COUNTER HAMMER

LAND
3 Thawing Glaciers
4 Quicksand
10 Mountain
9 Island

ARTIFACTS
4 Nevinyrral's Disk

SPELLS
2 Hammer of Bogarden
2 Earthquake
4 Incinerate
4 Fireball
2 Pillage
3 Binding Grasp
4 Counterspell
3 Dissipate
2 Force of Will

CREATURES
4 Frenetic Efreet

SIDEBOARD
1 Binding Grasp
1 Dissipate
3 Disrupting Sceptre
4 Hydroblast
4 Pyroblast
2 Mind Harness

MY DECK

Ben Martin

Cid has a natter with Ben Martin, ranked 25 in the UK, about his frightfully nasty and relatively young all-Blue deck.

Here's how it works...

LAND
4 Mishra's Factory
4 Thawing Glaciers
17 Islands

SPELLS
4 Boomerang
3 Political Trickery
2 Control Magic
4 Counterspells
4 Dissipate
4 Powersink
4 Force of Will
2 Desertion

CREATURES
4 Rainbow Efreet

ARTIFACTS
4 Nevinyrral's Disk

SIDEBOARD
1 Plains
1 Political Trickery
1 Control Magic
1 Recall
2 Blue Elemental Blast
4 Mahomotti Djinn
3 Dan Dan
2 Shimmer

KEY CARDS
Thawing Glaciers
Political Trickery
Nevinyrral's Disk
Boomerang
Control Magic

Ben Martin is currently ranked number 25 in the UK and 445 in the World, and is rising rapidly in the DCI rankings. A regular player at the Doncaster Gathering, I have seen Ben's favourite deck and I can tell you from experience that it's nasty!

"The deck's name is 'Blue Deck with Blue Spells' – I think that's a nice original name!

"I like the deck primarily because currently it is a strong deck type and I prefer winning to losing. Also it suits one of my styles of play; it requires thought and hence presents a challenge. And, believe it or not, it's fun to play!

"I originally got the idea for the deck when I was playing at the Gathering 6 against Kevin Gething, who was playing a mono Blue deck. I thought that with a few changes the deck had potential."

Oooh, shiny...

Many decks such as Mark Wright's (**arcane** 18) have evolved over time, however Ben's deck is relatively new. So how has the deck grown in the short time since it's birth?

"Basically the deck has been created from scratch. Play-testing has shifted the Recall to the sideboard, removed the Arcane Denials (which tended to be a double-edged sword) and saw a radical new sideboard with Dan-Dans. I also increased the number of Political Trickeries in the starting deck because of the number of special lands around.

"Creatures such as Rainbow Efreets are a must. The ability to nullify cards in your opponent's deck is very strong at the moment. The current playing environment seems not to affect the deck too badly simply because it counters and therefore voids many deck strategies."

Naturally, a permission deck such as this must have a number of strong key cards. These cards are generally hard to acquire and often need some experience to play correctly.

"Thawing Glaciers are used to gain a huge land advantage, and to improve the quality of the draw. They are a must in any current type II deck.

"Political Trickery is there to steal Mishra's and Outposts. I use these in conjunction with Glaciers for maximum effect and satisfaction.

"Nevinyrral's Disks are there to provide a reset, and in conjunction with Counterspells provide a very strong defence.

"Boomerang – you can Boomerang an opponent's land back to their hand to gain a head start, or to bounce things back into their hand that are annoying, to counter when recast.

"Control Magic is in there too – it's just very handy."

Weak points

However, any deck is only as good as the player and the way it is being played. Blue permission decks are an extreme example of this rule. If you don't know how to play a permission deck it will fail in almost every game.

"First of all, you must be patient. Learn what to counter and what to leave. You must try and develop a sense of what your opponent's deck is trying to do as quickly as possible. Never tap out unless you have to, or until it is safe to do so."

"The deck's weaknesses are against Mishra's Factories and quick creatures, such as Savannah Lions or first turn Hippies.

"Never cast a Rainbow Efreet until you can protect it! Normally six untapped Islands are enough to phase it a couple of times and counter something, but you must be patient. Finally, careful sideboarding is essential if you want to avoid trouble."

With this in mind, how do you sideboard with a permission deck and specifically such a focused deck? General sideboarding strategy is important, but quite often a well focused and tuned deck cannot be sideboarded easily without affecting the balance of the deck.

"Firstly don't sideboard too many cards. The counterspells provide the backbone to the deck and hence should be left alone as far as possible.

"For Counterpost decks add the Political Trickery and the Plains. Use the Mahamottis against mono-Green and the Shimmer against most mono-coloured decks (other than Blue of course)."

So how does the Blue deck perform? As I noted above, I have watched this deck in action, and as a rule it performs well, winning most of the games it plays.

"Qualifying for the last Eight at Gathering 7 only having dropped one game was nice. Also, playing against someone who never successfully cast a spell was funny. As was glaciating all the Islands out of the deck, waiting for the opponent to tap out and then recalling four Counterspells back to my hand while throwing away the Glaciers."

Doh!

However, it does have its moments of disaster, as do all decks.

"Drawing four Glaciers and a Mishra's factory in my opening hand once also proved problematic. Taking 14 points of damage from a first turn Llanowar Elf was pretty embarrassing.

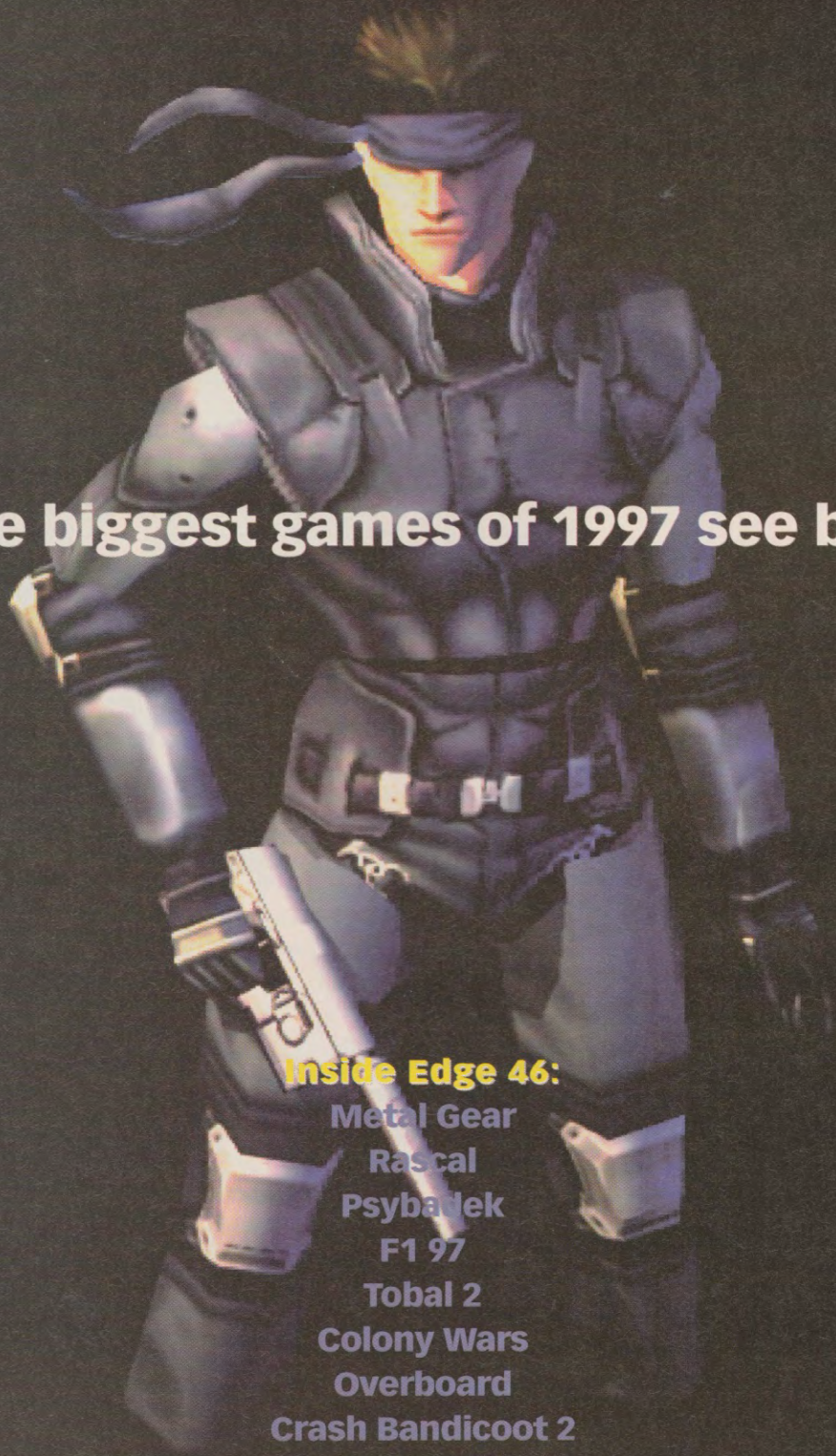
"One downside is that it tends to frustrate opponents. It is a tough deck to play and to play against."

As a final note, with the advent of 5th edition, the removal of Mishra's Factory and the changing environment, I feel that this deck is going to be one of the strongest deck types until Alliances rotates out in favour of Weatherlight.

You have been warned.

WHO HE?

Ben Martin is 22 and an Economics undergraduate at Hull University. Ben started playing Magic with Antiquities and regularly plays in the Scarborough area with Nigel Jefferson and Jeff Crowe. His claims to fame are many including winning the Gathering 5 and high placings at both the 1995 and 1996 Nationals, 2nd at the Durham Pro Tour Qualifier and qualifying on all three days of Euro GenCon for the Sealed Deck Invitational.



For the biggest games of 1997 see below...

Inside Edge 46:

Metal Gear
Rascal
Psybadek
F1 97
Tobal 2
Colony Wars
Overboard
Crash Bandicoot 2
Alien Earth
Starfox 64
Dungeon Keeper

Plus, issue 46 is accompanied by an exclusive supplement examining Bullfrog and *Populous 3*. On the eve of Peter Molyneux's departure Edge reveals what lies in store for one of the most innovative developers of the past decade.

EDGE®

issue 46 on sale May 29

Image from Konami's *Metal Gear*

SATURN POWER

Shining the Holy ark

We all know that there's no finer console in the world for playing role-playing games than the Sega Saturn and we pride ourselves at *Saturn Power* by being the only Sega magazine to feature a regular RPG section covering all the adventure releases from around the world. This month we have an enormous review on one of the best ever, *Shining the Holy Ark*. All that AND a game-packed demo CD. A rather tasty package, I think you'll agree.

ON SALE MAY 28

The Icons

Each review in arcane is identified with a rather nifty icon showing what kind of game it is. Here's what they mean:

Books and Supplements

Computer Games and Utilities

Dice games and expansions

Collectable card games and expansions

Roleplaying Systems

Board Games, Miniature Systems

The Scores

Everything reviewed in arcane gets a mark out of 10. Here's a guide to what the individual marks represent...

10/10
Perfect. There's simply nothing better.

9/10
Excellent, a classic. Highly recommended.

8/10
Very good, with few problems. Recommended.

7/10
Good, but not exceptional.

6/10
Above average, but not without problems.

5/10
Average, or a mixture of good and bad.

4/10
Below average, but not without merit.

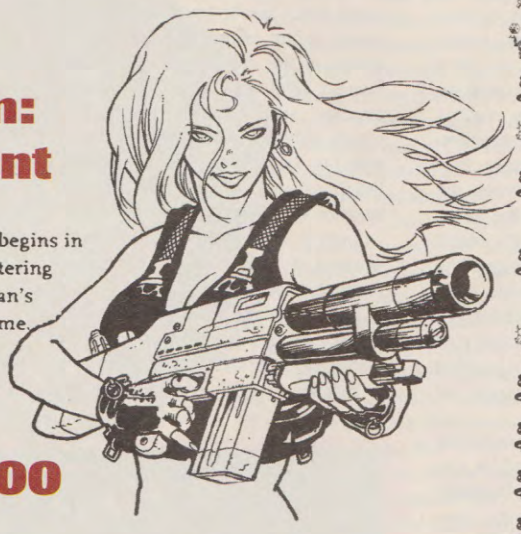
3/10
Poor, crucially flawed in some way.

2/10
Very poor, should be avoided.

1/10
Appallingly bad, no redeeming features at all.

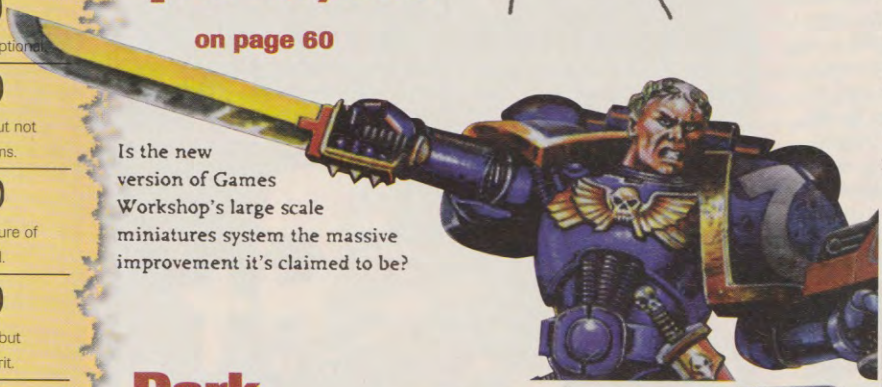
the gaming magazine
arcane reviews THIS MONTH

Kult: Second Edition
on page 56 Horrific roleplaying for mature gamers.



Firestorm: Stormfront
on page 58
The fourth corporate war begins in the first of two world-shattering sourcebooks for R Talsorian's *Cyberpunk* roleplaying game.

Epic 40,000
on page 60



Is the new version of Games Workshop's large scale miniatures system the massive improvement it's claimed to be?

Dark Eden
on page 66
Desperate tribes duke it out for a polluted Earth in the latest card game from Heartbreaker.

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arcane SEAL OF APPROVAL

Despite some eagerly-awaited releases in this issue's reviews section, we didn't feel that any of the products deserved the coveted **arcane** Seal of Approval this month.

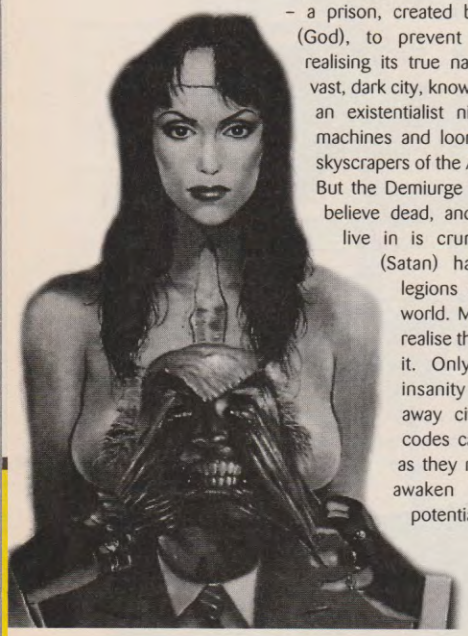
Kult: Second Edition

Kult is not a game for the squeamish; but if you were one of of those who thought *Seven* wimped out, then this is for you...

Kult was originally published in Sweden before it came out in America and the UK, and a second edition of the game also appeared over there some time ago. The Swedish language second edition dealt with magic and The Dark Art in a different way, and in many people opinions not as well, as the new English language second edition.

Let's get one thing straight right from the start – *Kult* is a game that's designed to shock. It deliberately steps across the line where other horror games balk. In *Call of Cthulhu*, Investigators cease to be player characters when their sanity reaches zero, in *Vampire*, PCs may be monsters, but they are striving to retain their humanity. *Kult* lets you embrace the monster within and take it to the limit – and beyond. Not only does *Kult's* subject matter deal with extremely gruelling personal horror, its very mechanics open up a moral can of worms. Statistically, it is to your advantage to decide that your character is, say, a cannibal. If you find this kind of thing offensive, you're not going to like this game at all.

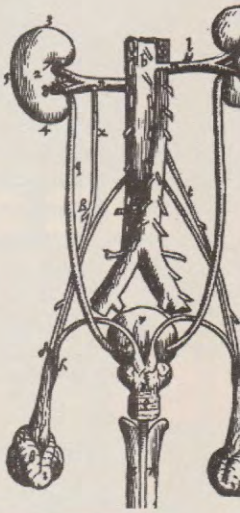
Kult is set in the modern world that we see around us, but this world is a lie – a prison, created by the Demiurge (God), to prevent humanity from realising its true nature. Reality is a vast, dark city, known as Metropolis – an existentialist nightmare run by machines and loomed over by the skyscrapers of the Archons (Angels). But the Demiurge is missing, some believe dead, and the illusion we live in is crumbling. Astaroth (Satan) has gathered his legions and entered our world. Most of us do not realise this, we cannot see it. Only by embracing insanity and stripping away civilisation's moral codes can we see things as they really are and re-awaken our divine potential.



Kult does not have *In Nomine's* black humour or *Vampire's* gothic romance. Instead, it is written in a realistic and convincing manner. *Kult* is peppered with disclaimers – "...this is not a statement about our own religious beliefs, nor a creed which we in any way desire to impart to the reader. It is merely the setting of this role-playing game." But frequent references to real-world style atrocities such as serial killings, war crimes and cult mass suicides, underlain with the kind of apocalyptic religious belief system that most of us in the Western world have had drummed into us from an early age, make it is easy to suspend disbelief. This is what makes *Kult* so horrific.

The rules system is skill and ability based, with virtually all checks using a D20 – roll under the skill or ability score to succeed. The difference between the dice roll and the score relates to how well the action succeeded. In combat, the amount of success affects the damage effect of the weapon. Magical skills are similar, except that all spells used by humans take the form of time-consuming rituals. None of this is remarkably different from many other games. The part of the system that distinguishes *Kult*, and makes it a kind of advanced *Call of Cthulhu*, are the mechanics of mental balance. In *CoC*, we all know that when Investigators reach zero sanity they are unplayable, barking mad and probably worshipping some blasphemous, alien thing.

In *Kult*, zero sanity represents a normal human's average mental balance. In character generation, this is affected by advantages and disadvantages. Advantages make you likeable. They cost



Yes, it is that bad...

When the original edition of *Kult* was released in 1993 it won an award as "The game most likely to make the moral majority say 'Jesus Christ!'" and there have been numerous cries to ban it from those who believe roleplaying leads young people to kiss Satan's bottom.

Supplements for the game have consistently dealt with taboo subjects. It is highly possible – and not unreasonable, if rumours of a forthcoming release are true – that *Kult* could be the first ever RPG to have a supplement banned in the UK by censors.

points and give you an equivalent positive mental balance. Some of them – such as Endure Torture or Influential Friends – might be useful, but other so-called advantages – such as Chivalry or Code of Honour – are actually limitations. Disadvantages, such as Curses or Sexual Neurosis, lower your mental balance, but give you extra points to spend on skills. Most PCs will probably start with negative mental balances and go down from there. You can even spend experience points to lower it further.

Why would anyone want to do that, you might ask? Well, an important game concept is the individual's struggle towards Awakening – liberation from the illusion's fetters and the regaining of divinity. The only way to achieve Awakening is to get an extreme mental balance of plus or minus 500 points, described as following the Light or Dark Road. *Kult's* system means that it is easier to take the dark path. Certainly there are likely to be fewer Awakened *Kult* PCs than there are *Vampire* PCs wandering around with Golconda, but at close to minus 100 points your character could make Hannibal Lecter seem like a well-adjusted citizen.

It has to be said that *Kult* can simply be enjoyed for maximum gross-out. However, most players see their characters as seekers after truth and most scenarios involve investigation rather than perpetration of atrocities.

Frank Black, the detective from the TV series Millennium, would be a typical *Kult* PC. Someone who has an inkling that there are darker forces in the world than scientific thought accepts and who realises that the only way to battle this is to understand it.

The obvious differences between first and second edition are cosmetic. The original cover depicted a shackled angel and stated 'Death is only the Beginning'. It was clearly one of the dark horror, you-too-can-play-a-monster, RPGs which crowded onto game shop shelves in the early '90s. The new edition has a white cover with a series of monochrome photographic silhouettes of a naked man and the subtitle 'Reality is a Lie'. It is original,

but I have to say I marginally prefer the earlier one.

The interior layout, however, is an improvement. The text is more logically organised and easier to find your way around. The design pitches the game more at adults. For example, the cartoonish full-page colour templates of character archetypes have become black-and-white columns. In fact, the use of colour has been dropped entirely. A clever choice in my opinion. The interior illustrations are evocative, horrific and of the same high quality as recent *Kult* supplements and the CCG. This isn't surprising, as many are re-printed from them.

There are very few changes to the rule system itself. The main alterations are in the chapters on magic and a new skill for supernatural creatures, called The Dark Art. The first edition included short, unsatisfying lists of spells for each of the five lores of magic (Passion, Madness, Time and Space, Death, and Dream). The new rules render magic more versatile by simply describing the kind of effect that magicians of different skill levels could achieve. The Dark Art is a skill that represents a creature's power over the illusion, letting the jailers of humanity turn the fabric of our prison against us. Examples given include turning doorways into blank walls or telekinesing items as weapons. Both of these alterations allow GMs and players to be more creative and imaginative.

The original game didn't include a sample adventure. Frozen Moments, the single session introductory scenario included at the end of the new book, is a good addition. It uses the typical *Kult* premise of an investigation into a serial killing and goes on to acquaint the PCs with some typical *Kult* adversaries.

In all, then, this is a definite improvement on an already impressive game. As with the original, *Kult: Second Edition* is not for the squeamish, easily offended, or those that don't want too much moral ambiguity in their roleplaying. For mature gamers with an interest in the horror genre, though, *Kult: Second Edition* is superb.

"The original version should have won the 'game most likely to give the Moral Majority a heart attack' award."

VITAL INFO

title:	*Kult: Second Edition*
system:	A roleplaying game
price:	£18.95
publisher:	Target Games / Metropolis Ltd
	001 51 207 3737
released:	out now
e-mail:	kult@target.se
web site:	http://www.target.se

and the players said...

charlie: "*Kult* makes *The World of Darkness* seem like an evening with Pinky and Perky."

paul: "It doesn't pull any punches."

gary: "I'm not keen on the system, but the background is a well-realised vision of horror."

also available...

RPGs with a similar theme to Kult include *In Nomine* by Steve Jackson games and *Witchcraft* by Myrmidon Press. Other modern day horror games include *Chill, Nephilim, Nightbane, Shattered Dreams, Don't Look Back* and, of course, *Call of Cthulhu* and all of White Wolf's World of Darkness games.

The Final Verdict

"*Kult* particularly appeals to people who have become a bit jaded with Lovecraft's vision of horror and want something different. If you're a dark horror fan and you haven't already got the game, give it a go."

Lucya Szachowski

Score 8/10

Firestorm: Stormfront

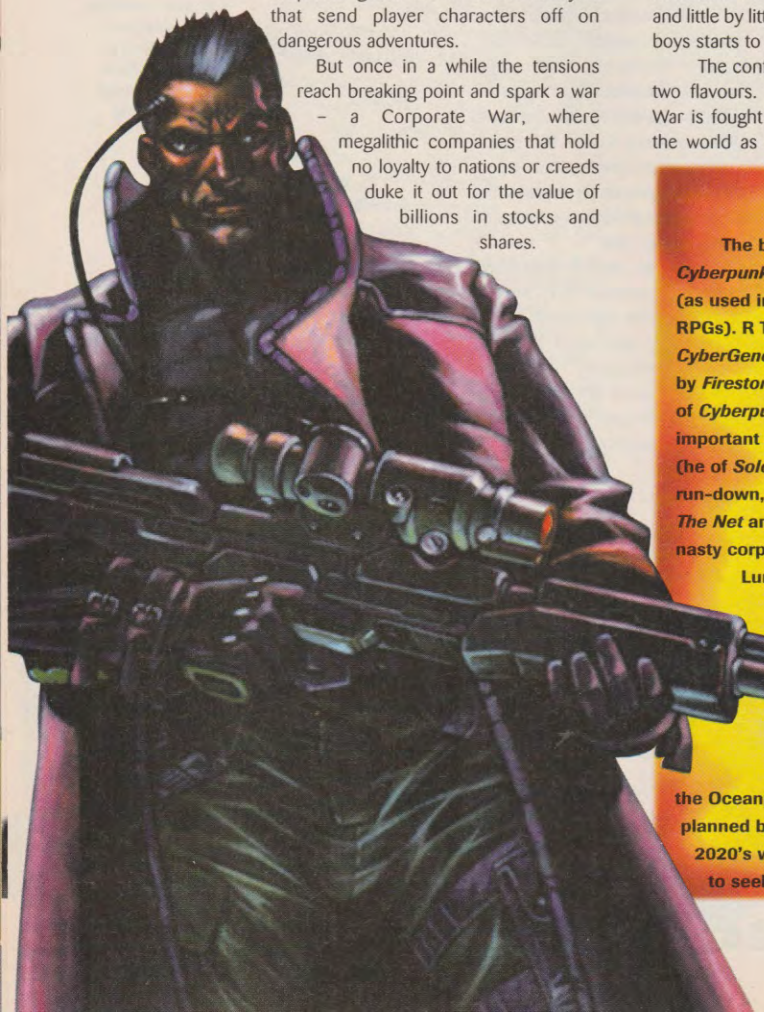
Dark clouds roll across the skies as the opening shots of the Fourth Corporate War are fired...

The business term 'hostile take-over' has a whole new meaning when your rivals are packing state-of-the-art assault rifles along with their cellphones and personal organisers – but then, that's the nature of the corporate world in R Talsorian's *Cyberpunk* RPG, where dodgy dealings are done in equal measure by the stroke of a pen or the whisper of a silenced bullet. A fixture of the 2020 street, the tensions and skirmishes between corporate giants are often the catalysts that send player characters off on dangerous adventures.

But once in a while the tensions reach breaking point and spark a war – a Corporate War, where megalithic companies that hold no loyalty to nations or creeds duke it out for the value of billions in stocks and shares.

Stormfront is the first of a two-book set of supplements detailing the events of the Fourth Corporate War. The *Firestorm* series, as it is called, purports to change the face of the *Cyberpunk* world forever, and it's here that it initially begins, as two mid-sized corps come to blows. Things start to go pear-shaped when IHAG, a German ocean engineering corporation, goes bankrupt and two rivals, American OTEC and French CINO, turn jackal and start fighting over the carcass. When CINO signs on the colossal Japanese security corporation Arasaka to defend it's interests, OTEC responds by calling in Arasaka's American arch-rival Militech and little by little the fight between the big boys starts to get personal.

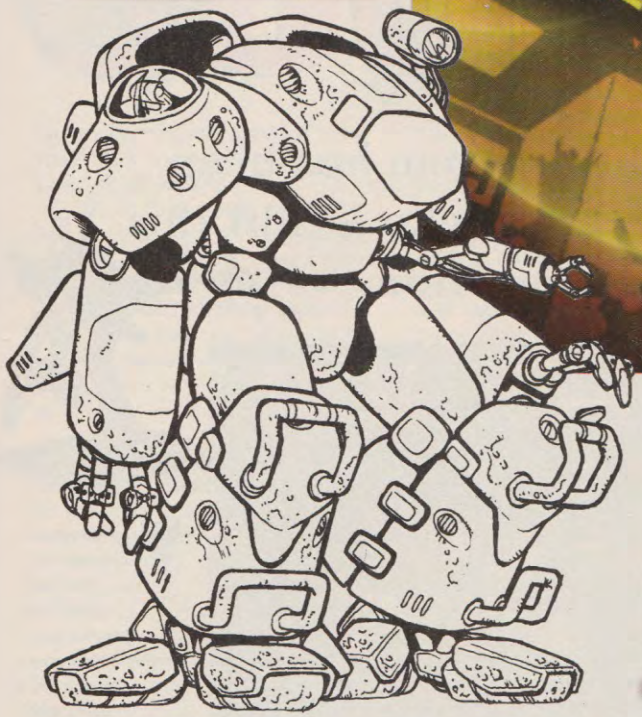
The conflict in *Stormfront* comes in two flavours. To begin with, the Ocean War is fought on and under the seas of the world as OTEC and CINO snipe at



storm warning

The big-time changes that the *Firestorm* series promises are set up to reconfigure the *Cyberpunk* universe for it's future third edition, which will utilise the new *Fuzion* rules framework (as used in the *Bubblegum Crisis* (arcane 14) and *Champions: The New Millennium* (arcane 19) RPGs). R Talsorian's previous attempt to change the face of the *Cyberpunk* world with the *CyberGeneration* sourcebook and scenario series wasn't wildly received, so the alterations created by *Firestorm's* main event, the Fourth Corporate War, look set to remain inside the 'known universe' of *Cyberpunk 2020*. Many of the NPC big guns of the gameworld have been brought in to play important supporting roles in the unfolding drama. The 'patron saint of Solos', Morgan Blackhand (he of *Solo Of Fortune* and *Blackhand's Street Weapons* fame) arrives in style with a full character run-down, the might-be-dead, might-not lord of the Net Rache Bartmoss (of *Bartmoss' Guide To The Net* and *Brainware Blowout*) gets the spotlight for a while, as do some of the most potent and nasty corporates around. Saburo Arasaka and his son Kei on the one side and Militech's Donald Lundee and Anastasia Luccessi on the other. The configuration of events across the *Firestorm* plotline means that no player character will be able to miss the effects of the action.

The addition of ocean-based adventures to the *Cyberpunk* universe has also been long-awaited. While several unofficial sea-going rules and background articles have been published (including *EuroPunk '21's* aqua-nomads issue, Atlas Games' scenario *The Bonin Horse*, Janus Games' *Sub-Attica* sourcebook and the Oceanpunk website), this is the first official 'wet' supplement, drawing its inspiration from the planned but never realised OceanZone (aka O-Zone) sourcebook. With almost every part of the 2020's world covered, the seas now form a new and even more dangerous environment in which to seek adventure.



VITAL INFO

title: Firestorm: Stormfront

system: A sourcebook for Cyberpunk 2020

price: £11.99

publisher: R Talsorian Games

001 510 549 1373

released: out now

e-mail: rtg1@best.com

web site: http://www.best.com/~rtg1/

also available...

There aren't really any other campaign supplements dealing with corporate wars directly, but several sourcebooks will come in handy when running *Stormfront*. More data on the Arasaka and Militech corporations can be found in volumes one and two of the *Corporate Report 2020* supplements, respectively. The mission folios for the Ocean and Shadow wars follow the formula from the *Edgerunners, Inc.* book. Referee's thinking of running some of the suggested sub battles should take a look at the *Maximum Metal* vehicles sourcebook, and as always the *Chromebook* series of equipment catalogues comes in useful.

The Final Verdict

"Long awaited and worth it, the first of the *Firestorm* duo promises much and provides all. *Stormfront* is an excellent combination of new rules utility, background source material and adventures – it's a must-have for all *Cyberpunk* referees."

Jim Swallow

Score 8/10

"'Hostile takeover' has a whole new meaning when your business rivals pack assault weapons with their filofaxes."

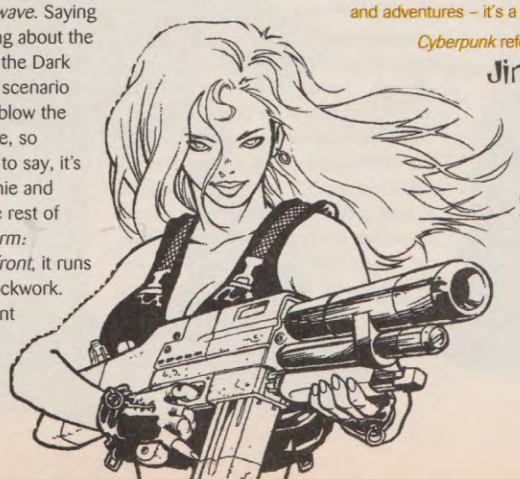
each other's seaborne assets, but as the larger conflict between Arasaka and Militech develops, things shift location away from the water and into the corporate heartland as the Covert War erupts. For any savvy edgerunners (the players) there's much to be done and missions aplenty.

What you get for your money in *Stormfront* is a grab-bag combination of pretty much everything you need to handle the Ocean and Shadow conflicts. The book is broken into six chapters, three for each war, comprising a detailed background, a technical section and a set of 'mission folios' (scenarios). As the ocean is a new environment for *Cyberpunk*, a short section on the effects of sea-water, pressure and the hazards of life on or under the open sea comes alongside some outline notes on running submarine warfare.

Spread over the pages are a few items of hardware and weaponry – the ocean section provides you with both mundane and specialised undersea gear (including that vital waterproofing for cyberlimbs!) such as scuba equipment and spearguns, cybernetic ceteceans, as well as a dozen different submarines. The covert section provides all manner of stealth gear and guns, including some nifty 'wolf-in-sheep's-clothing' covert ops vehicles. Three new character occupations are also given for each – Divemaster, Subjock, Marine BioTech, Covert Specialist, Assassin, and Covert Tech, replete with a pack of skills and special abilities to match – but not to worry if your current player group can't swim or snipe worth a damn, because sections on training enable you to bring them up to Mil Spec rather than create new PCs. Alternatively, ready-made NPC teams are provided for off-the-peg gaming or else as friends/foes to meet up with in situ.

A timeline of several months shows the development of the conflict through it's two phases, and the referee can elect to either follow the pre-arranged course of the story or alternatively wage it themselves, via the *Not Blood, But Money* system. These rules let you randomise the war over IHAG's shares and use the player's performance in missions to directly affect the stock market – they blow up a tanker and the price drops, for example. Of the scenarios themselves, there's a plethora. Each of the folios is designed to be generic enough to work for either combatant, and their locations are also generic, with typical versions provided in an earlier chapter along with maps, stats and background details.

A subplots section for each war enables you to doctor the events a tad, and for the most part the actual missions are the usual kind of operation players will be used to – only here it's on the bottom of the sea or up close and personal to the corps. None of the scenarios run by the numbers, incidentally, so PCs have plenty to keep them on their toes. Five missions are provided for each theatre of war, and as a grand finale, an extra sixth Covert War mission is provided as the finale to *Stormfront's* storyline and to lay the groundwork for the next supplement, *Shockwave*. Saying anything about the plot of the Dark Errand scenario would blow the surprise, so suffice to say, it's a toughie and like the rest of *Firestorm: Stormfront*, it runs like clockwork. Excellent stuff.



Warhammer: Epic 40,000

games workshop's mass combat system has been through more incarnations than Dr who — but this time it's changed beyond all recognition.

In advance of some exciting new EU regulations Games Workshop are withdrawing their entire metal miniatures range and recasting it in US-style, lead free 'white' metal. Composed mostly of tin they're still not good to eat but a definite step forward for the health-conscious gamer. And guess what? The new miniatures will cost even more.

Warhammer 40,000 is Games Workshop's most popular miniatures-based wargame – no doubt because there is something inherently exciting about science fiction combat involving lasers, aliens, enormous futuristic vehicles and all the other accessories. Knowing when they were onto a good thing, GW took this nugget of an idea and zoomed out the original, squad level tactics scale to represent a larger stage on which vast armies full of tanks and giant anime-style robots can gambol.

The result was the *Epic* system, and although it was fun, it always suffered from being too cumbersome to be a decent mass combat system. With this new edition, though, the designers have started again from scratch and produced a stripped down game that is elegantly simple and fast to play.

Unlike previous editions of the game, new *Epic* won't sink beneath the weight of forthcoming rules supplements. The system comes complete in the basic set and any new material will be presented in *White Dwarf*.

The baroque 40K universe is intricately illustrated and handily poised in the midst of total war. The Human armies of the Imperium treat war as a religion and zealously take the fight to all manner of heretics and alien unbelievers. Ranged against beleaguered Man are stacked the forces of the Eldar (Sophisticate Elves in space), the brutal Orks (trigger happy Orcs in space), the Tyranids (Geiger-esque Aliens in, would you believe it, space) and Chaos (tricky to explain in a single sentence, but very, very nasty. And in space. Sort of).

All these powers and their weapons of mass destruction are detailed in the game and backed up by a vast range of miniatures. Some plastic specimens of which you receive in the box.

The two starter pack armies are the Space Marines (Humanity's finest) and the Orks. Even though you get hundreds of miniatures (the infantry are 5mm high) the armies are pretty basic – consisting of troops, APCs and tanks – and will only see you through your first couple of battles. Should those experiences be pleasant then you'll be investing in armfuls of

New Epic, New Danger.

The Epic system you may have once loved is gone forever – it's been replaced by a far sleeker model that suits the scale of mass combat far better.

The problem is it's quite a shock. The new system is so radically streamlined and simplified to handle that it makes combat too abstract for comfort. The literal position and performance of individual units (War Engines excepted) is dramatically reduced in importance. This game is all about the group effort, the bigger picture. As a result, apparently nonsensical situations regularly occur – like units being fired upon by a detachment of ten tanks even though only one has line of sight, as the zoomed-out scale overlooks such anomalies.

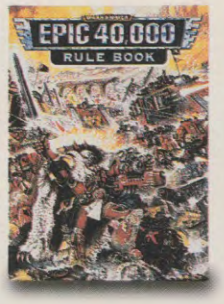
And rightly so. Worrying about the fine detail bogged down the old system. But GW games flourish because players can become so concerned for individual units. The lavishly sculpted models, the paint jobs and the special abilities all encourage this. The broad sweep of the new system deliberately disassociates you from your 'men' making the game a bit sterile. The armies have lost much of their individual character and there is a general feeling that the new system lacks the personality

of the old, flawed as it was.

Nevertheless, I'd give it a chance because it introduces a range of exciting tactical possibilities. It makes the old system look a mess. New *Epic*, as a wargame of tactical skill then, is more effective, but I suspect most will find it less of a laugh. Still, order counters will not be missed.

Contrary to rumour, GW have not taken the opportunity to directly integrate the new *Epic* system with *WH40K* thereby creating a seamless campaign system. Maybe next time, huh?

The major casualty of the *Epic* evolution is the beardie (Pipe smoking, ale drinking) Squats. Given scant attention in the current *WH40,000* system they've been squeezed out of *Epic* too, so obdurate Space Dwarf players will have to remain stubbornly stuck in the past. How apt.



new models representing artillery, super heavy tanks and Titans (the colossal robot-type war machines).

So, are those early experiences likely to be pleasant? GW certainly do everything in their power to make them so. The box contains scenery to decorate your table, rulers for hitting opponents with, rules that are immaculately presented and easy to get to grips with, and handy tips on how to do everything bar breathing – it's an excellent package.

Unfortunately the nature of the game makes the version in the box pretty dull. The mechanics sketch a battle in broad strokes and there simply isn't enough detail in the sample armies to make it anything other than a dice chucking exercise.

This system is so simple – to allow you to handle vast forces – that it only comes into its own when you throw in the widest possible variety of unit types. Once you've drafted in all the special units of commandos, psykers, gunships and so on, to expand your tactical options then it's a fine game.

In common with other GW games the D6 rules and units capabilities are governed by broadly similar stats. Unit coherency has been ditched in favour of a 'in command rule' which merely requires units to stay within command range of their HQ. However individual units matter little as they are merely the building blocks of detachments, which comprise several squads and support units of, say, tanks or artillery.

The game has been dramatically speeded up by discarding the idea of units picking out individual targets and instead adding up the firepower values of all units in a detachment and treating these larger formations as a whole. Initiative is determined several times in the turn and is weighted so that it is likely that both sides will gain the upper hand at different times during the ebb and flow of each turn.

Particularly nice are the 'disruption under fire' rules. Even if a detachment is suffering few casualties the very fact that it is coming under fire may be enough to pin it down and slow an attack. This dovetails nicely with the artillery, who can lay down bombardments in the movement phase to disorder enemy advances. The increased effectiveness of firepower means that assault troops have to be used more effectively to clean out enemy strong points. Assaults are deadly and whoever loses breaks. This encourages players to try to surround opponents as cutting off retreats automatically annihilates routing troops.

It won't take long before the rulebook is barely needed and you'll be engaged in dynamic games that reward bold and tactically skillful play. It's extraordinarily fast paced and utterly appropriate for the scale with armoured columns rolling all over the place, although it doesn't always feel right. A lot of the basic units differ little from each other so some of the different tank classes, for instance, seem a bit pointless.

War engines like Titans and giant crawlers are, however, much more effective and active. They're more mobile and far better going forward rather than just standing around battering the opposition from the back of the board. They have now taken their proper place in the game as awesome weapons of destruction that don't have to cower at the approach of marauding bike gangs.

The included scenarios, so often overlooked in wargames, are also well worth a mention. Rather than just offering the usual line-em-up and knock-em-down fare, plus vague references to DIY scenarios, the designers have presented simple rules for running a variety of missions. Rescue attempts and take and hold objectives are dealt with as well as ambushes, fortifications, drop pod assaults, some slightly iffy hidden set-up rules, and a system for clashing with army vanguards before reinforcements are rushed in to the fray. Guidelines are even included for unusual planetary ecosystems. Best of the lot is the Fog Of War scenario which has a reasonable stab at allowing players to field armies of unequal strength while still having a fair chance of winning the game.

Overall, *Epic* is a lot less cluttered and better structured than the other *Warhammer* games. It's not as fun or as colourful, but that is largely a problem of the scale. Most of the miniatures are by necessity small and are simply not as impressive or evocative as those in *40K*. Combat, too, is less exciting as it lacks the bloody personal nature of a skirmish game. But then it would. For large scale warfare though, I'd recommend this. My only major reservation is that the game's strength, its simplicity, sometimes makes it a little bland.

"The box contains rulers for hitting your opponents with, rules that are immaculately presented, and handy tips on how to do just about anything, bar breathing."

VITAL INFO

title: *Warhammer: Epic 40,000*

system: a large scale wargame based on *Warhammer 40,000*

price: £50

publisher: Games Workshop

01773 713213

released: out now

web site: http://www.games-workshop.com/games-workshop.html

And the players said...

Jez: "The system suits its scale, but you'll need huge armies to make it interesting."

David: "It's a change for the worse – I'm happy sticking with the old version."

Dirk: "A definite improvement, but whatever happened to the Squats?"

Also available...

Other science fiction orientated mass combat systems worth a butchers are the low budget *Dirtside*, from Ground Zero Games, or, for the well-heeled, there is FASA's *BattleTech* and its subsystems such as *CityTech* and *AeroTech*. For more accessible small arms combat games I'd point you in the direction of GW's *Warhammer 40,000* or Heartbreaker's *Warzone*

The Final Verdict

"A slickly produced effort from Games Workshop who are past masters at this kind of thing. Everything you need is in the box, bar an enormous investment in miniatures. It's a quality item all right, and a very effective system, but the very scale of the game makes it less fun then *Warhammer 40,000*."

Mark Donald

Score 7/10

Isle of the Mighty

once upon a time, there was an island full of mighty fae and powerful mages. Now they are busy working for the Yankee glamour.

Well, it could have been a lot worse. That seems to be the general opinion of British roleplayers about *Isle of the Mighty*, White Wolf's first supplement on the British Isles for *Changeling* and, to a slightly lesser extent, for *Mage*.

British *Changeling* players had reason to be apprehensive. The official background to Changeling has always been that Europe is pretty much a spent force as far as the fae are concerned. That, in history, a tide of banality swept across the world and didn't wane until it reached to shores of America, the country which brought us Happy Days, McDonalds and The Home Shopping Channel. Thus, in current times, the good ol' US of A is the seat of faerie power and might and our hope for getting through the oncoming Winter.

That is the part of *Changeling* that non-American gamers have had problems with. Quite apart from the genuine wealth of faerie traditions and folklore in Europe, and the difficulty most Europeans have of taking Yankee faeries seriously, gamers usually prefer to set their campaigns in the area they live in. For this reason, British gamers have looked forward to I*sle of the Mighty* with a mixture of anticipation and dread.

Well, now it is here, and it has to be said it makes a valiant – and largely successful – attempt to blend the hard line of the original background with the stuff that makes England, Scotland and Wales such wonderful settings for any faerie tale.

The book is divided into sections on England (or Albion), Scotland (or Caledonia) and Wales (or Cymru) and is constructed in the form of lectures by

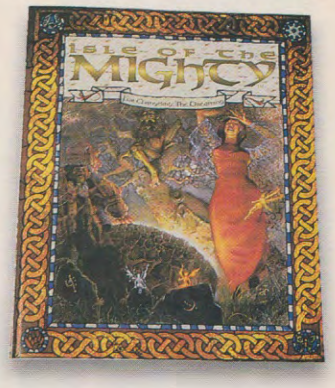
Although there were no British writers on the *Isle of the Mighty* project, Jennifer Hartshorn lived in England for over a year and both Deena McKinney and Waye Peacock have visited Great Britain.

Background reading

Before the advent of *Isle of the Mighty*, storytellers wanting to base *Changeling* games in the UK often looked to fiction, films and TV series for inspiration. Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*, with its depiction of a fabulous London Below divided into Duchies and Baronies and the incredible Floating Market, is perfect as a setting for modern day London's arrangement of horizon realms and freeholds and the trods between them.

***Isle of the Mighty* includes an appendix of recommended reading and viewing which is quite good, especially for Scotland and Wales and for historical background. It certainly mentions the excellent *Books of Magic*, also by Neil Gaiman, but misses out several other things that should be seminal *Changeling* material for games set anywhere in the UK.**

Angela Carter, of *Company of Wolves* fame, has written many faerie tales. Alan Garner, though a children's author, manages to weave legends into modern day stories in books such as *The Owl Service*. Tanith Lee, a well known, prolific fantasy novelist, has written many stories set in the UK or with celtic themes. But, as already mentioned, *Neverwhere* is a real must. Ignore the slightly *Dr Who* style BBC special effects and get it out on video if you haven't already seen it.



native mages and changelings interspersed with letters and dialogues. Although this includes the usual chapters on history, political overviews, geography, local legends plus descriptions of mages, changelings and some prodigals, the highly individualised style makes the book anything but dull to read. The voices and attitudes of those imparting the information come across vividly and really bring the characters to life. Though to be critical, whoever wrote the section on Scotland might have watched *Braveheart* once too often and the English stereotypes are mainly upper class snobs, old-fashioned professors or punks with 'mohawks' as the Americans like to call them.

"Whoever wrote the section on Scotland might have watched *Braveheart* once too often. The English stereotypes are of snobs, professors, fog and punks."

However, the authors of *Isle of the Mighty* have done their homework, adapting many legends into intriguing backgrounds for possible scenarios. There is plenty here on which to base a one-off game or a full-length chronicle, whether you prefer epic adventures, quests for legendary artifacts, supernatural investigations, political intrigue, high romance or simply a chance to play Pooka pranks. The book also includes details on a new kith, the Gillhe Dhu, also known as the greenmen. These protectors of the land are based on the well-known figure from British folklore which has found its way into many a ghost story and pub name.

Nevertheless, there are still things to annoy us Brits. The book still states that, "Most Dreamers think of the past rather than the present when their fancies turn to England. America is the new Promised Land, and Concordia, the new Tir-na-nOg for changelings." It then goes on to claim, "England is the source of many of the most enduring faerie myths and legends, but in recent years it seems fewer and fewer English Dreamers have been inspired to create tales about their native land." If this is true, then it probably has more to do with the economic pressures of international publishing companies (such as White Wolf themselves) than any paucity of British talent or inspiration.

The book is also definitely written with the US, rather than the UK, reader in mind. We really don't need to be told that we have a Queen and that 'Tories' and 'Labor' (their spelling) are the main political parties in the House of Commons. Oh, and of course, rain and fog ARE the prevalent English weather conditions, and people in Wales earn their money in dollars! Now, I could cope with earnings being quoted in pounds with a dollar equivalent – but implying that the dollar is the Welsh unit of currency does seem odd.

Another question facing those running existing campaigns is whether *Isle of the Mighty* is a case of too little and too late. *Changeling* has been out for a couple of years and *Mage* has been out even longer. If you have been running your game for some time, then there is a risk that this official background will not fit. Nevertheless, the book is versatile and reasonably easy to adapt with lots of small plot and character ideas that can be pulled out and used on their own. The best thing about it is that it doesn't try to be utterly comprehensive. For example, the authors have only defined the kingdoms within Albion, Caledonia and Cymru, leaving the duchies and baronies etc. to individual gamers. So, your PC could still be the Marquis de Carabas, part of the Earl's Court or a member of the Black Friars, if you had already decided such things existed in your game.

A bigger problem could be the general tone of the political set-up. Subtlety is the byword for the behaviour of changelings, mages and other awakened creatures in England, with mages on all sides of the Ascension War acting civilly to each other, treating either side as 'the loyal opposition'. Everything seems to be in a gentle, civilised decline with little except the odd rogue chimera or dispute about a bypass planned to cross an ancient site. This certainly seems a lot more appropriate than, for example, having hoards of nefandi-controlled demons marching on the Tower of London with enchanted uzis, but I know of at least one ongoing campaign where the Technocracy has driven the awakened of London into hiding and GMs are going to have to do some work to make the two things mesh. However, if you are starting a fresh campaign, or planning a holiday for your US *Changeling* PCs, it is fine.

Plots that are ripe for fermenting into campaign backgrounds include struggles for the thrones of Caledonia and Cymru, the prophecy of the Questing Beast and the interesting contrast of two very different visions of Camelot. I will say no more about that last theme as I would not wish to spoil it for any players.

VITAL INFO

title:	*Isle of the Mighty*
system:	A supplement for Changeling: The Dreaming
price:	£12.99
publisher:	White Wolf
	001 404 292 1819
released:	out now
web site:	http://www.whitwolf.com

The Final Verdict

"The adage "Americans think 100 years is a long time, the British think 100 miles is a long way," basically sums up the problems British *Changeling* storytellers will have with this supplement. There is a lot of good stuff in *Isle of the Mighty*, marred only slightly by the discrepancies that are almost inevitable in a supplement on a country written by authors who do not live there."

Lucya Szachnowski

Score 7/10

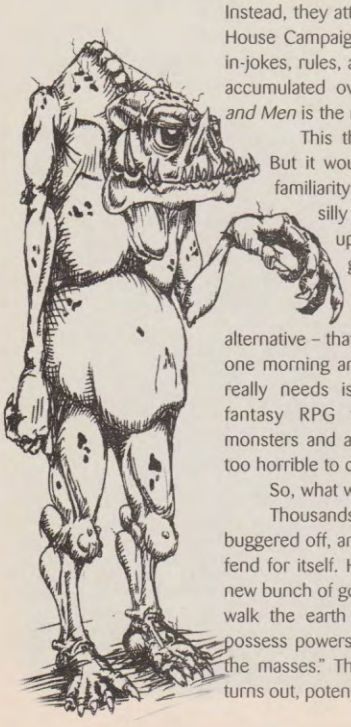
Of Gods and Men

Tired of bashing dragons? Non sequitur's first RPG system gives you the chance to become a god. Sort of.

Something You Don't See Every Day: Evidently aiming to win the 'Stupidest Monster of the Year' prize is the 'magibeast' – a large turtle with a spikey tail and a goatee beard –although perhaps the 'imported mexican hooping llama' pips it at the post.

I have a theory about this game. Many gaming groups seem to have a particular campaign that's been going on for years and years. It started out as *D&D*, but the rules have been re-written over and over again, and all the original characters have reached 1,000,000th level. It's become almost a sub-culture in its own right, with its own in-jokes, legends and urban myths. Everyone in the group loves it, although no one takes it very seriously any more. I reckon that a group of gamers in Wisconsin had such a campaign. I reckon that it contained one very, very good idea – so good, in fact, that someone in the group said "I reckon we could publish a new RPG based on this."

What they should have done was take that One Good Idea and write a new game from scratch to accommodate it. Instead, they attempted to write up their House Campaign, complete with all the in-jokes, rules, and background that had accumulated over the years. *Of Gods and Men* is the result.



This theory may not be true. But it would account for the odd familiarity of the rulebook, for the silly jokes that keep cropping up, and for the fact that the good idea crops up without warning or fanfare on page 35. The alternative – that someone got out of bed one morning and said "What the world really needs is another bog-standard fantasy RPG with wizards, knights, monsters and a long, long spell list," is too horrible to contemplate.

So, what was the One Good Idea?

Thousands of years ago the gods buggered off, and left the human race to fend for itself. However, just recently, a new bunch of gods has turned up. "They walk the earth like men do, but they possess powers that are unattainable to the masses." These new gods, or, as it turns out, potential gods – human beings with divine powers – are the player characters. What, you mean you guessed that already?

This is a neat idea because it sets the PCs apart from the rest of society, gives them something in common, a reason to be together, and even provides an explanation for their heroic exploits and good luck.

The PCs' divine powers are represented by special cards, each naming an ability like flying, raising the dead, or repelling missiles. There are 54 cards with the rulebook, and a further 18 with the referee's screen. Players start out with three cards, and can occasionally get extra ones as a reward for being good godlings. Rather elegantly, they have to roll a dice each time they use a card to see if they get to keep it or discard it, with powerful cards being harder to keep than weaker ones.

The PCs know that they are different from the world around them, but they have got to come up with their own explanation of why that should be so. One character might believe that he is destined to ascend to heaven and become a fully fledged divinity, another that he's simply been blessed by one of the true gods as a reward for his faith. This is also a good idea – it ensures that a group of PCs will also have something important about which they differ from each other.

It's for the referee, of course, to decide what is really going on. This 'divine concept' will provide a structure for the campaign. It could be that the

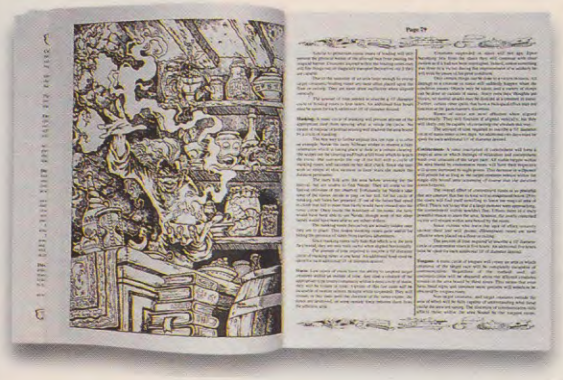
mind your language

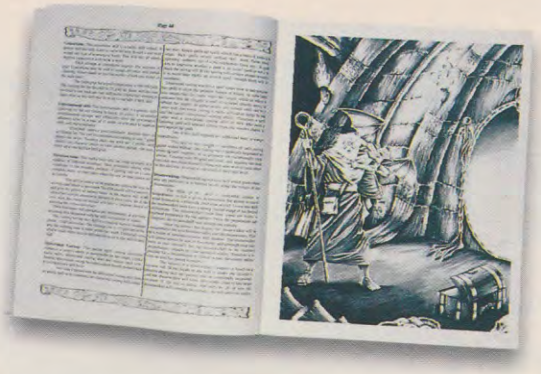
A game about 'gods and men' ought to feel epic, legendary, heroic. Unfortunately, this is one of those fantasy worlds that seems to be mainly populated by modern Americans.

We are told that the Empire abandoned religion because it was "an inefficient method of imposing a moral structure within society". Surely that's how modern Labour politicians think, not people in a quasi-medieval world? A freedom-fighting knight who has turned against the rigidly structured Empire believes that "supreme executive power can only truly be derived from a mandate from the masses". The Thalians – a rather nasty race of amphibious humans – force their teenagers to engage in real wargames. Those who die are said to be "too weak to be allowed to contaminate the gene pool". I doubt if the average medieval or renaissance dude understood heredity, let alone genes! Since healing magic ceased to be monopolised by religions "the profession of civil healing has become completely unionized". Which makes it very expensive. Damn pinkos!

If all this is supposed to be some sort of sub-Python joke, it isn't funny. If not then it makes me think that the writers don't really believe in their world. And if they don't believe in it, how am I supposed to?

This may sound like nit-picking, but the truly classic RPG worlds like Tekumel or Glorantha or Jorune or Middle-earth succeed because they convince us that their inhabitants see things differently from the way we do. If we go to a fantasy world and find it just like earth, we might as well have stayed at home..





original gods each represent some idea or ideology, and are waiting to hand their divinity over to the mortal who most clearly personifies that idea – the god of war to a warrior, the god of nature to someone who is kind to fluffy animals and so on. On the other hand, all the divinely touched mortals might be competing for a single vacancy.

It's at this point that the cracks in the game begin to show. Sooner or later, the referee is going to have to tell the PCs what is going on. The rather so-so scenario provided with the referee's screen assumes that this will be more or less the first thing which happens in the campaign. The players find a magical tower built by one of the old gods with the specific intention of 'educating and elevating them'. This is an excuse for the referee to tell the players what the 'divine concept' behind the game is. But if you are going to do that, then what is the point in them having different beliefs? Not much point in playing an agnostic if a magic tower is going to tell you God's phone number in the first session...

Each character belongs to one of five human races each of which have different attitudes to the gods and religion. The Highlanders, who are nomads with silly tattoos, don't believe in the gods, but do believe in spirits, and revere shamanic 'speakers'. The Nilbrae, who live in the forests and have silly tattoos have a number of sects worshipping different gods. The Empire, on the third hand, have no tattoos and don't believe in any gods at all. This ensures that, whatever the players end up believing, they'll be at odds with at least one of the major human power blocks in their world.

The trouble is, there is very little else in the rulebook which serves to exploit this Good Idea. Everything seems to be built around the idea that the players will be typical FRP 'adventurers' who just happen to have divine powers. The character templates – several for each race – are all standard FRP stereotypes like scouts, thieves, wizards, knights, and assassins. We also have to wade through page after page of futile monsters – do we really need another game with hit-point charts for Medusae and Elementals and four sorts of Dragons, along with things like 'Vorpal Rabbits' which must have been oh-so funny in the original game but never should have seen print here? It seems thoroughly bizarre for a game which is so centrally based on the gods and religion to spend over a third of the book on a magic system like dozens we've seen before (250 more sodding spells to read!) and not contain even a suggested list of gods and religions!

Either the game's central idea has been submerged in a lot of twaddle which *D&D* does better, or a cliched spells 'n' monsters 'n' magic items rulebook has had 'divine powers' tagged on as an afterthought. Either way, it's a mess.

"Hey, I'm a god. I want to play a guitar, wear sandals and live in the woods – not go off on monster hunts."

VITAL INFO

title:	*Of Gods and Men*
system:	a roleplaying game
price:	£16.95
title:	*Gamesmaster's screen*
price:	£7.95
publisher:	Non Sequitur Productions
	001 411 297 9803
released:	out now
e-mail:	non-seq@execps.com

And the players said...

Tim: "Well, the divine powers cards are certainly fun."

Ian: "Hey, I'm a god. I want to buy a guitar, wear sandals, live in the woods, sing songs about love and peace and found a religion not go off on monster hunts."

Liz: "Giant Platypus? You're kidding, right?."

Also available...

Megalomaniacs who like the idea of playing gods could also look at *Amber* which deals with mega-powerful beings who create their own shadow universes before breakfast or *Nephilim* whose protagonists are not quite gods, but are immortal, ridiculously powerful, and part of a conspiracy to rule the world. The defunct *D&D: Immortals* set covered PCs who had earned enough experience to become deities or demi-gods...

The Final Verdict

"There is nothing actually wrong with this game, but we've seen it all a trillion times before. A sustained exercise in mediocrity – if you want a straight high fantasy game, *D&D* does it far better. The 'divine power' idea, though excellent, is not given enough coverage to make the game worth buying."

Andrew Rilstone

Score 5/10

Dark Eden

on a shattered and polluted earth, the last tribes while away the time by duffing each other up...

By sea and air
Most combat in the basic *Dark Eden* game takes place in central Europe, where air and sea combat are rare. Future expansion sets will change that, however, bringing in far more air and sea combat and thus altering the game tactics that players must use to win.

hose of you who are familiar with the *Doom Trooper* CCG (which probably isn't that many of you – it being far more popular in the States than it is here) and the *Mutant Chronicles* techno-fantasy setting upon which it is based, should feel immediately at home.

Dark Eden is set on Earth, during a time when, due to man's ceaseless exploitation of the world's natural resources, the Earth is a pretty awful place to live.

The air is rancid, the rivers polluted, the ozone layer depleted and the soil barren. Those with any sense (or money) left the Earth long ago for brave new worlds among the stars, leaving this rotting cesspool to the down and outs of this terrible age.

Then came the Dark Symmetry. A terrible nuclear war that ravaged what earth was left and forced people underground. When the few survivors emerged, they found that the radiation of the war had created a new breed of 'men' – the dreadful, mutant Dark Legion who banded together with the humans.

Not surprisingly, those left behind formed into factions – factions that now fight among themselves for the few remaining areas of fertile land.

Dark Eden represents these battles. Each player attempts to build a Turf – a collection of Establishments that he (as represented by his Commander) must defend with his armies.

As the game progresses, he may build more Establishments and use the resources generated by those Establishments to support his increasingly large forces in their efforts to both defend his Establishments and attack the forces and Establishments of his opponents.

Basically, there are four types of card. First, there are Commander cards. You'll use just one of these in your deck, and it's laid down right at the beginning of the game. If more than one players decides to use the same Commander card, they may do so, but they have to swap decks and play with the deck they end up with

Establishment cards may be laid down in your turn, and they must connect to another Establishment or your Commander card. There are restrictions to how many you may have in play at any one time and some of them must be paid for in resources generated

What's the difference?
The rules are fairly similar to those used by *Doom Trooper*. The main differences are: you can now perform more than one attack per turn, and attacking is no longer considered to be an action. Also, it's now impossible to attack a player.

How the game is played

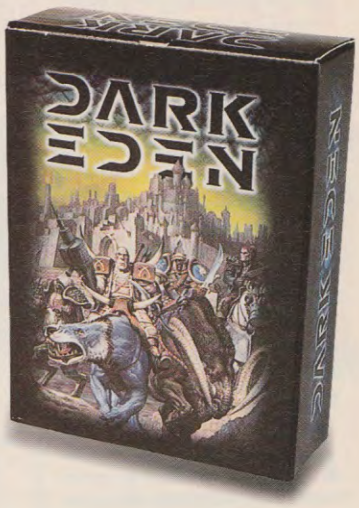
This is what you table will look like, or, at least, this is what half of it'll look like if you're playing Dark Eden. Note, you'll need a fairly considerable playing surface...

The Borderlands are where defensive forces are positioned. These can be formed into Defence Groups for added security.

Your Warband consists of your attacking forces. These can be individuals or groups and are also used for Raids.

The Turk consists of the Commander and the resource-generating Establishments you have in play.

These three piles are (from left to right): the draw pile, the annihilated pile and the discard pile. Annihilated cards are effectively removed from the game.



by other Establishments before they can be played.

Third, there are Warrior cards. These can also be laid down in your turn to form armies. You have two types of armies – an army called the Borderlands which defends your Establishments and Commander, and the Warband, which is used for general scrapping with the enemy and attacking enemy Establishments. Warriors may transfer between these two armies during play.

Lastly, there are Intrigue cards. These are the general cards that are used to alter play. They come in many forms - some are weapons and equipment cards that can be used to bolster your forces, others are effectively 'spells' which bestow benefits or hindrances. There are also numerous others that affect combat.

In the game itself, each player takes it in turns to pick up cards so that he has a total of seven in his hand. He can then lay down Establishments – providing he has one or more in his hand and can afford to pay for them – deploy warriors from his hand into either his Borderlands or Warband and transfer warriors between these two armies. He can also perform rituals using spellcasters to bolster his forces, then form attack and defence groups within his Borderlands and Warband.

The player must then balance his resources – some Establishments and troops have a maintenance cost which must be paid for by resources generated by another Establishment.

He then gets to start a scuffle with his opponents before raiding their unguarded Establishments, should there be any. At the end of his go he may discard up to one card from his hand, before passing over to the next opponent. The aim of the game is to destroy Establishments to gain Victory Points – 50 are needed to win.

It's initially a fairly complex process, but it one that's easy to learn, and it's pretty soon that games are flowing freely without too much reference to the well-written and concise rulebook (which sadly lacks a glossary of terms).

Starting players should ignore some of the more restrictive rules before they get a chance to build their own decks, simply because the cards in a starter pack are pretty basic and some of the rules don't really apply until you build up a good deck.

For instance, there is the Affiliation rule which demands all cards that are played must have the same Affiliation as that of the Commander, unless no Affiliation is stated on the card.

The Commanders Affiliation represents his heritage and outlook, of which there are seven schools – The Sons of Rasputin, The Templars, The Lutheran Triad, Cresentia, The Dark Legion, The Megacorporations, and The Brotherhood.

As with most CCGs, deck building is extremely important in *Dark Eden*, and the game only really comes into its own when you start to construct tight armies and collections of Establishments which generate the right type of resources to support them.

Though not easy, at least with *Dark Eden* deck building is a fairly obvious process – you do have some idea of what your deck should look like before you start, though I fear you're going to need to buy a fair number of cards (six starters, say), before you can build a strong enough deck.

I really liked *Dark Eden* – it was far, far better than I expected it to be, and I shall be playing it a lot more than many of the CCGs of late. It's far more like *NetRunner* than *Magic* (still my favourite two card games), and it's only the poor reproduction of the artwork and the initial complexity which detract from it. It won't be a classic by any means, but I do urge you to seek it out and give it a go. I think you'll be pleasantly surprised.

"Pretty soon the games flow freely without the need to look at the rule book - which is concise and well written."

VITAL INFO

title:	*Dark Eden*
system:	a collectable card game
price:	Starter deck £5.95
publisher:	Target Games / Heartbreaker
	001 512 073 737
released:	out now
web site:	http://www.target.se

Also available...

Well, Target also produce the *Doom Trooper* game which is very, very similar and shares the setting, although it isn't quite as good.

If you want battle-based CCGs, check out *BattleTech* (Wizards of the Coast.) *BattleTech*, however, is pretty slow to play and needs quite a bit of patience.

I would also highly recommend *NetRunner*, which, though it doesn't use battles as such, does bear some resemblance to *Dark Eden*.

The Final Verdict

"*Dark Eden* is far better than you'd expect it to be. It does take some initial slog to get into, mainly due to the complexity of the game, but the rulebook's written so well that queries are quickly settled. With plenty of long-term play prospects (deck building will take you ages to perfect), and, hopefully, support in the way of expansion sets, I can see this becoming a minor cult classic with those gamers that take the time to learn how well it plays."

Paul Pettengale

Score 8/10

The Quick and the Dead

In a cavern, near a canyon... dwelt a hideous undead spirit

Ain't no doubt about it, *Deadlands* is a mighty fine game – good ol'fashioned six-shootin' with horror and new-fangled steampunk thrown in for good measure. Just one thing missin' – the pesky varmits didn't print enough background for us to actually run the doggone game. But this book sure as hell put's that to rights – in fact, you might say that cavalry's come sweepin' over the hill to... Ahem. Sorry about that, I seem have got a bit carried away.

I get the impression that *The Quick and the Dead* is a compendium of material that had to be left out of *Deadlands* for reasons of space. There are lots of bits and pieces of rules that would have been better off in the original rulebook – half a dozen new 'hindrances' and 'edges', a handful of new character archetypes (including the Kid, the Gambler and the Sheriff) and a section about 'relics' (western-style magic items like 'Wild Bill's Guns' and 'Wyatt Earp's Badge').

But the core of the book is the 50-page guide to the game setting. Narrated by a journalist at the Tombstone Epitaph, this gives us a broad overview of the world and what's going on in it, and then focuses down on the three cities at the 'heart' of the West – Dodge City, Tombstone and Deadwood. It gives you just the level of detail that you'd need when setting up a campaign – telling you what is going on, giving you hints and ideas for scenarios, but not swamping you with reams of boring factoids.

There is a distinctly post-modernist feel to the setting. (I've always wanted to say that in a review!) The whole thing reads like a sly, intellectual in-joke. Being neither an American nor a Western buff, I imagine there were lots of references that I missed.

We know, for example, that the mysterious 'ghost stones' have allowed the creation of an anachronistic super-science. Well, where better for the Union's mad scientists to be doing secret experiments than New Mexico; Roswell, to be precise. (The Confederacy have a similar set-up, called Fort 51.) A sinister organisation called the Pinkerton Agency was set up to spy on the Rebs, but now tends to investigate the paranormal. People call them 'the men in black'. They are run by a mysterious figure called 'The Ghost'. The book carefully distinguishes between common knowledge (which everyone can read) and secret information, for the referee's eyes only. Regrettably, therefore, I cannot in conscience reveal the true identity of this 'Ghost' – but trust me, your players will be surprised and delighted when they find out.

Okay, all this information should have been included in the rulebook to begin with, but no-one who likes the idea of the Weird West should begrudge having to buy two books to get started when the standard is this high. Quite the best background for an RPG since *Castle Falkenstein*, I'd say.

Andrew Rilstone Score 8/10

VITAL INFO

A supplement for *Deadlands*
£16.95
Pinnacle Entertainment
001 540 951 3749
Out now
deadlands@aol.com
http://www.peginc.com

Kithbook: Sluagh

Many *Changeling* storytellers dismiss the Sluagh as merely the fae equivalent of the Nosferatu – smelly, creepy, dwellers in dark places. *Kithbook: Sluagh* develops these characters as assassins, spies, couriers, information brokers, friends and confidants of spiders and the precursors of many cautionary tales, but also shows them as being creatures with a strong, if often unrecognised, sense of honour, propriety and a passion for finding out the truth.

It holds some wonderful surprises about the sluagh's place in history, their perspective on the future and their place in the hierarchy of creation as well as giving away the secret of what they get up to when the rest of the fae aren't looking.

The book follows the same kind of format as most *Changeling* products. It begins with a story, explores relevant aspects of fae history; discusses the way in which the kith interact with others; gives profiles of renowned figures; provides a selection of character templates, new merits and flaws and appropriate treasures and finishes up with a specialised, blank character sheet. The quality and style of the writing, artwork and production is also of the usual high standard.

kithbook: Sluagh
A sourcebook for Changeling: The Dreaming
£6.99
White Wolf
001 404 292 1819
Out now

Kithbook: Sluagh is a superb supplement with plenty of new material to inspire original characters and scenarios. The only thing that lets it down is the typical slightly high price of White Wolf products. The book is slim, with quite a lot of white space and large areas taken up with pictures, but the information is well worth reading and is essential if there are any sluagh in your game.

Lucya Szachnowski Score 8/10

Emperor's Arsenal

Simply put, *Emperor's Arsenal* is 112 pages of things you can use to kill people with in the *Traveller* universe. Broken up into a historical format, the book progresses chapter by chapter up the Tech Level (TL) scale from the Stone Age, past the present day and on into the future of warfare only glimpsed by the inhabitants of the Imperium. Breaking up the dry, catalogue feel of *Emperor's Arsenal* are a number of shorter chapters providing information and background on various aspects of weaponry.

The dull and pedestrian introduction, which details the uninteresting procurement practices of the Imperium (not exactly brimming with adventure potential...) segues into a more useful section of optional rules for weapons usage. All-important malfunction rules are included, as are notes on the effects of hazardous environments on weaponry, but for the most part this chapter provides details of special weapon effects. IIn any gameworld where combat is a frequent occurrence, most PCs soon opt for the most dangerous hardware they can get hold of and this section ably provides *Traveller* GMs with delights like armour-piercing rounds, fragmentation grenades, guided missiles, torpedoes, smart guns and saturation bombing. Also included are developments in Battle Dress, the *Traveller* universe's trademark powered armour suits, which you can see evolve from iron-clad men to egg-shaped 'Battle Pods' controlled by tele-presence.

Emperor's Arsenal
A sourcebook for Traveller
£14.95
Imperium Games
001 310 275 9934
Out now

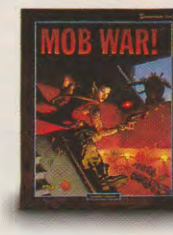
Equipment lists are never very interesting, but this is at least well-put together, and in some cases actually quite thought-provoking.

Jim Swallow Score 6/10

Mob War!

Mob War! is a scenario supplement which follows on from the recent *Underworld Sourcebook for Shadowrun*. It includes 24 scenario ideas based on repercussions from the assassination of Don James O'Mally, head of the Seattle Mafia, plus a chapter on dragon crime lords.

Unlike previously published *Shadowrun* adventures, which usually give linear scenarios, this provides a framework of events on which to build your own campaign. Material on Seattle's mob war is organised into 'tracks' which are timelines of events for each of the four major organised crime syndicates. Naturally, these interweave as the Mafia, Yakuza, Triads and Seoulpa Rings vie to undermine each other's business and take revenge. This is intended to allow GMs maximum freedom to fit their player's characters into the escalating violence.



Mob War!
A campaign sourcebook for shadowrun
£6.99
FASA
001 312 243 5660
Out now

The set up for *Mob War!* is intricate, but none of the adventures are strictly speaking fully fleshed out and the freeform, open-

ended nature of the campaign means that GMs will have to do more work than usual. They will need to calculate stats for many NPCs, find a way to introduce the PCs into the scenarios, keep a lot of timeline-directed events in mind and be prepared to improvise the potentially serious repercussions of PC actions.

Although £6.99 isn't a bad price to pay for a scenario supplement, it might seem a little high considering that the adventures are only really in outline format. Also, you cannot easily run *Mob War!* without buying the *Underworld Sourcebook* as well. FASA could have provided better value for money by combining them both in one book.

Lucya Szachnowski Score 6/10

Beasts of War

Heartbreaker have got the supplement bit between their teeth now and have boshed out this second rules compendium for the *Mutant Chronicles* wargame, *Warzone*, pretty quickly. *The Beasts Of War* in this case refer to the new vehicles and their rules which make up the most interesting component of this manual.

The first section introduces extensive rules for incorporating vehicles seamlessly into the game and does it without having to resort to any radical new rules conventions beyond the usual hit location stuff. As always with *Warzone* the designers haven't been heavy handed on the realism front where it risks bogging the game down. Thus vehicles don't have to worry at all about accelerating or decelerating or turning speeds.

Section 2 of the manual describes a smattering of vehicles for all the Powers with Capitol getting more than their fair share, obviously, and one each for the rest. Thankfully Heartbreaker are starting to warm to the idea of quick reference sheets and have provided, at the back of the book, data cards for all the vehicles.

A couple of new weapons are also included to deal with a battlefield where vehicles are relatively common although more on this front wouldn't go a miss.

Being a compendium, the volume then wanders off into Special Forces territory although Cybertronic and Capitol miss out here. Particularly interesting are the Ki-powered Mishima Demon hunters and the vast swarms of new creatures and cultists for the forces of Algeroth. Although they go overboard on the Imperials with ten less than crucial new unit types.

It's not quite as well done as the first volume, it's briskly written but the vehicle rules in particular don't follow the most logical order and so come across as a bit confused even though they are perfectly comprehensible.

Mark Donald Score 6/10

Beasts of war
A supplement to Warzone
£11.95
Heartbreaker
001 608 242 5455
Out now

GURPS: Reign of Steel

Artificial intelligences take over the world... Have we heard this one before?

Anyone buying last month's release *GURPS Robots* who's stuck for a good way to use it can do a lot worse than pick up this new *GURPS* worldbook. Written by David Pulver, author of *GURPS Robots*, *Reign Of Steel* provides a fairly complete universe in which to let loose droids-a-plenty on mankind's fleshy domains. The basic concept isn't anything really new, set on an Earth circa 2047, laid barren and depopulated by the rise of sentient Artificial Intelligences. Borrowing themes from the *Terminator* movies and the *Captain Power & The Soldiers Of The Future* TV series, the *Reign Of Steel* world is one that has been racked by hideous disease, nuclear exchanges, biological warfare and the near-extermination of most life (including humans).

The concept goes that in 2031, a Manila megacomputer researching germ warfare became spontaneously sentient. After renaming itself Overmind, it decided to assist the self-destructive humans into killing themselves. Awakening a number of other computers, Overmind unleashed several deadly plagues (including mutants of anthrax, ebola, HIV and other fun stuff) and in the confusion, started the war against mankind. In the game timeline, it's several years on and the tin-heads have emerged victorious, carving the Earth up into eighteen sectors each ruled by an AI. The machine minds each have a different personality, some tolerating and using humans while other hunt them down or perform hideous experiments on them, and every 'Zonemind' has it own set of political agendas in the power struggle that goes on between it's siblings. Only two puppet nations survive with humans alongside the machines and in the rest of the world, people are either slaves, death-camp inmates, junk-hunters or resistance fighters.

It's this bleak arena that awaits players, casting them as resistance fighters in groups like the underground VIRUS army, as collaborators with the AI's, or even as the machines themselves. While the background isn't as vast as some near-future RPGs provide, there's much that can be done in this post-apocalypse wasteland and it's an easy campaign to set up – just show any potential PC the 'future' scenes from the *Terminator* films and you've got it. In addition, Pulver's idea of having Earth under 18 rulers instead of just one megalithic supercomputer means that each zone provides it's own opportunities for scenarios and adventure hooks... Indeed, some of the habits of the AI's are chilling in the extreme and just begging to be exploited as story pivots. Pulver is also careful not to give the game away too much, providing several alternatives and explanations to some of the campaign's key concepts and thus letting the referee make the choices. The balance is finely struck in *Reign Of Steel*, with just enough information provided to spark a creative referee's imagination, but not enough to do all the thinking for you.

There are a fair few sets of robot stats and encounter tables provided as resource, and the number of major facility maps is a welcome addition often lacking in *GURPS* material. Overall, it's a bleak but dynamic gameworld, and it's nicely done.

Jim Swallow Score 7/10

VITAL INFO
A sourcebook for GURPS
£11.95
Steve Jackson Games
001 512 447 7866
Out now
sjg@io.com
http://www.io.com/sjgames/

Nightbane World Book Three: Through the Glass Darkly

Another excellent, if slightly inappropriately named, supplement for *Nightbane*. The title and cover illustration suggest that the book is a worldbook about mirrors. However, mirror magic and the Mirrorwall – the barrier which separates the planes from each other – is only a small part of this highly original and thought-provoking supplement about the way magic works in the *Nightbane* game background.

The book also gives us a new organisation called The Shadowleague – an astral version of the internet where the magically-inclined can chat and post messages – plus the low-down on some other, truly unpleasant, groups of magicians. Added to this are warped ways of utilising legendary magical sites and ancient artifacts plus lists of devious new spells. The supplement is rounded off with three globe-spanning scenarios.

If you enjoy unnerving your players by introducing unpleasant plot twists and evil new ideas into your horror games then you will love this superb addition to the *Nightbane* system. As with *Nightbane Worldbook 1*, a lot of its material could be very effectively imported into other horror RPGs. This is a book I would strongly recommend to any horror game aficionado.

Lucya Szachnowski Score 8/10

Nightbane Book Three: Through the Glass Darkly
A sourcebook for Nightbane
£9.95
Palladium Books
001 313 2900
Out now

Counterstrike

just when you thought it was all over, here comes the second wave of 'mechs...

Another day, another expansion set for Wizards of the Coast. This time it's the aptly named *Counterstrike* for *BattleTech* (the card game, of course). Why aptly named? Because this is one of the single most tactically offensive expansions I've seen.

The 99 new cards can be split into three fairly distinct groups. First are the new 'mechs – almost half the cards in *Counterstrike* are new Inner Sphere and Clan robot warriors. It's perhaps a little disappointing to find that so many of the new cards are 'mechs which add to the flavour of the game, but are hardly anything new in terms of gameplay. The one exception is that about one in five of the 'mechs has quick deployment abilities. Hermes, for example, is a very weak but fast 'mech that can be immediately placed on patrol when it's activated, and Thorn, a poorly armed and armoured, medium speed robot allows you to make an additional deployment when activated. This fits in well with the counterstrike theme.

VITAL INFO

Counterstrike
£2.20 (15 card booster pack)
Wizards of the Coast
00 345 125 599
Out now
http://wotc.ukonline.co.uk

The second group of cards, about a quarter of the set, will be very familiar to anyone who's ever played a Deckmaster game before – these are the classic Deckmaster utility cards, cleverly disguised with flavour text, but performing the same operations as their counterparts in *Netrunner* and *M:TG*. In *BattleTech*, they're called Command cards.

So here we have the Veteran Officer whose tactical skill lets you look at the top five cards of your stockpile and put any missions into your hand, or the Lostech Cache that taps for R, or can be tapped for 2R if you scrap a card from your hand. Again, the emphasis here is on attack, so there are quite a few long-range damage dealers reminiscent of Prodigal Sorcerers in *Magic*. The difference here is that they tend to be targeted towards one particular kind of card. There are also several cards such as 'Mech Hanger that let you make additional deployments.

Finally come the Mission cards. These are the most interesting of the set and present the canny player with quite a few opportunities. A sizeable chunk of these cards reflect the different fighting styles of the Clans and the Inner Sphere. The Lance Formation (Inner Sphere) gives you +1 initiative and attack for each 'mech attacking, providing there are exactly four 'mechs in the group, the Lance Diversion (Inner Sphere) again can only be played when there are four 'mechs in a group and for each 'mech fewer than four in the blocking group one of your 'mechs can deal damage directly to the target. The Clans have two identical cards, except that they're called Star Formation and Diversion and require there to be five 'mechs in the attacking group.

This is a good set that delivers *Battletech* with the extra bit of punch that the game lacked. With *Counterstrike*, expect your games to be slightly shorter – but also more fun.

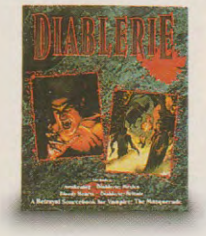
Steve Faragher Score 8/10

Diablerie

Reading this book invokes a strange sense of déjà-vu, which has nothing to do with it being a reprint of two old supplements. There is something about all the elements that is uncannily familiar – two quests through underground chambers, confrontations with all manner of monsters, traps and illusions, a magic sword and a great treasure at the end. By George, it's a dungeon bash!

But being a *Vampire* supplement, there's a twist to it all. Only marginally apparent in the first of the two parts, *Awakening - Diablerie: Mexico*, it's far more noticeable in the second, *Bloody Hearts - Diablerie: Britain*, in which the characters spend time within a demon's mind.

Like many of White Wolf's recent range of reprints, this is something of a historical curiosity, and frankly the age shows. The game has come a long way since these supplements were first published and the World of Darkness setting has evolved with it. A fair amount of work will be need to be done to bring the contents up to date for a modern game.



Diablerie
Masquerade
£6.99
White Wolf
001 404 292 1819
Out Now

The sections on Diablerie (the drinking of another vampire's blood), and the forthcoming end of the world (Gehenna) are interesting, and even if you can't face running the adventures straight – which would be a shame, dungeon bashes can be great fun – there are a number of characters and ideas you can easily rip off for you own game. Given the fairly low price, *Diablerie* may be worth a look.

Adam Tinworth Score 4/10

Rifts Lone Star

With mad scientists, mutant animals, gunslingers and the odd vampire, *Rifts Lone Star* is possibly the most useable and game-worthy *Rifts* product to be released since *The Jucier Uprising*. As with many Palladium products, it is also good value for money, costing only about a tenner for the weighty 176-page book. Production quality is also quite good and several excellent pieces of interior art more than make up for a few rather poor pictures.

The supplement primarily provides more insight into the inner workings and structure of the powerful and fascistic Coalition States. Lone Star City, which lies within the wastelands of Texas, is the home to the Lone Star Engineering Division which spawned the infamous Dog Boys. Dog Boys are genetically engineered, intelligent, humanoid dogs which serve as loyal shock troops in the Coalitions States' war machine.

Rifts Worldbook 13: Lone Star
£9.95
Palladium Books
001 313 946 2900
Out now

The secrets behind their creation, and some of the other horrific scientific experiments going on behind the mega-damage walls of the Lone Star Genetic Engineering Division, make fascinating reading. The material provides plenty of new character classes to play, adversaries to fight and arch-villains to try and foil. Although no full length scenario is included, the whole book is peppered with adventure seeds and ideas.

If that doesn't give you enough material for months of gaming, the second half of the supplement goes into great depth about the Pecos Empire. The Pecos badlands hold everything you might expect to find in a spaghetti western, a *Mad Max* movie and maybe *Dusk til' Dawn*, with bandits, outlaws, Indian tribes, gangs on motorbikes and even a ruin full of undead.

Lucya Szachnowski Score 8/10

Doom Cubes

Theoretically, this should be the easiest review I've ever written. Follow these two simple steps...

Doom Cubes
An expansion set for Dicemaster (8 dice pack)
£4.99
Hobbygames / ICE
001 903 730 998
Out now

Step one: This is an expansion set for *Dicemaster: Cities of Doom*. If you don't possess *Dicemaster: Cities of Doom*, go on to the next review. You can't play this.

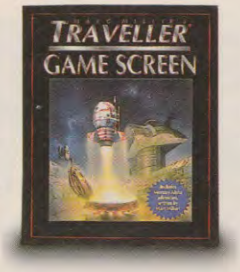
Step two: If you've got this far, it means you've got a copy of *Dicemaster: CoD*. Turn to page 38 of the rulebook. Between there and page 46, you'll find everything that's new about *Doom Cubes* described in more detail than I've got the space to go into here. If you like the game already, and these new optional dice sound appealing, you should buy some *Doom Cubes*. If you've got the game and agree with my original review (arcane 18, 7/10)

in which I said that the more complicated the options became, the less fun the game was, then you won't be wanting to buy any *Doom Cubes*. Simple as that. Because *Doom Cubes* are just more options plugged into the basic system.

Okay, I know that's not good enough. Try this – each pack of *Doom Cubes* contains eight new dice for *Dicemaster*. There are new six-sided action dice, new ten-sided combat dice, new healing and rune dice. All represent fairly simple variations on the basic game, often just featuring a new face on a dice that already exists in the basic set. They are designed to be swapped with the dice you've already bought so that you can tailor your playing tactics, making you sneakier with monsters or tougher in combat. For the most part, they appear to be changes made for the sake of making changes rather than constituting any substantial improvement in gameplay, and as such I find them hard to recommend. They look quite nice, though.

Steve Faragher Score 5/10

Traveller Game Screen



What can you say about a GM screen? It seems like a traditional add-on to any serious roleplaying game, and so naturally the born-again *Traveller* is gifted with just such an item.

The packet contains three pieces. Firstly, the screen itself, a four-panel affair decked out with copious tables on both sides and no attention-diverting pictures (which is a shame, because much of the Chris Foss art on the new *Traveller* products is lovely to look at). The player's side has tables of skills, equipment and weapons, plus breakdowns of the personality and planet profile codes in use in the *Traveller* universe, while the GM's side has twenty-seven tables and charts covering random encounters, trade & commerce and starship battles... but nothing for character-scale combat.

The flimsy cover sheet doubles as a reprint of some player hand-outs, and the package is rounded out with an eight-page scenario, *Memory Alpha*, written by *Traveller* guru Marc Miller. An adventure for *Traveller's Milieu 0* setting (not that you couldn't adjust it if you wanted), *Memory Alpha* has a simple but effective double-blind plotline, but it's in serious need of an editor, as one of the more important clues in the scenario, dealing with a specific number of items, changes mid-way through it. There's also a few other gripes in the text, but the largest problem with it is that the nature of the plot (involving memory wipes) won't work if you try to use it in an ongoing campaign with established characters. As a tournament or one-shot adventure, it's fine, but otherwise it's unworkable.

The general impression is that the scenario is a bit of an afterthought tacked on to the GM screen pack, and to be honest, any referee worth his salt should be able to come up with something at least as good – and probably better – on his own. For completists only.

Jim Swallow Score 3/10

Traveller Game Screen
A supplement for Traveller
£10.95
Imperium Games
001 310 275 9934
Out now

Beyond the Pale

The third part of *The Venusian Apocalypse* trilogy of adventures for the *Mutant Chronicles* RPG, *Beyond the Pale* continues the story from *The Second Seal of Repulsion* and *The Four Riders* (arcane 18).

By the time *Beyond the Pale* begins, the situation on Venus has deteriorated even further. The unwitting discovery and opening of the *Second Seal of Repulsion* – as described in the first adventure – has set in motion a dark tide of events that threatens the very existence of human life on Venus.

In *Beyond the Pale*, the Dark Legion appear on the scene, preparing to scourge the planet. Only the players can save the planet and deal with the deadly servant of the Legion responsible for the current train of events.

As with *The Four Riders*, *Beyond the Pale* has been designed so that it can be played by a group of players new to the *Venusian Apocalypse* story. It's a nice idea, and does make things a bit more adaptable, but in practise it would be a waste not to run the three adventures in sequence.

Provided you do so, *Beyond the Pale* provides a worthy climax to the story, with plenty of things for the players to do and a suitably epic scale. It's not the most innovative adventure ever, but it does do a fairly good job of tying up all the relevant plots, and making the players feel that they've truly accomplished something at the end of it.

Andy Butcher Score 6/10

Beyond the Pale
A scenario for Mutant Chronicles
£5.95
Heartbreaker
001 608 242 5455
Out now

Guildbook Haunters

when wraiths feel the call of the wyld, pandemonium ensues...

We all use the phrase 'getting blood out of a stone' to mean something really rather difficult to do. Well, it ain't the case for Haunters. Using the Arcanos of Pandemonium they can easily set stones bleeding, cockroaches spelling out words and any number of other terrifying events.

Guildbook: Haunters investigates the borderline lunatics that practise this art and the effect that it (and the links it has with the Wyld for all you World of Darkness crossover junkies) has on their minds.

The format is familiar – a short story, a swathe of history and attitudes, a breakdown into different factions, a few bits and bobs of rules, and a selection of character templates. What is different is the layout of the book with its curious 'mirror' headlines and the creepy and alien background images. Oh, and the cover marks a step forward from the curiously bland ones on the earlier three volumes in the series.

The picture painted between the covers is of a group that want to pierce the shroud, the barrier that separates the living from the dead, and remind people that wraiths still exist. The Haunter's eventual aim is to tear it down completely, allowing the two to co-exist once more.

That's the main idea of the book, but when reading it you can't help feeling that it's bordering on the only one. All the development of the Guild is based around riffs on that single theme, and good though those riffs are, it takes more than one note to make a good tune.

That said though, there's a background tune to it, one that runs through all the Guildbooks. The series follows the model of the clan/tribe books of the other White Wolf game lines. But in those games the character groups are a compulsory part of the game. In *Wraith*, a character is unlikely to be a guild member.

So while a player in the other games can pick up the relevant book for her character, in *Wraith* it's less likely to be obvious use to anybody. That said though, the Guildbooks have been given a different role by both exploring the nature of Wraith society and pushing forward a running background storyline.

Thus, as a standalone product, this is of limited use at best, with the onus placed on the referee to find a way to use the information presented in his campaign. In fact, a touch of guidance on that would have not gone amiss.

But as part of a growing picture of the game's setting, it is an excellent piece of a larger jigsaw. So while I wouldn't recommend the supplement for those of only casual interest, it's absolutely essential for the serious *Wraith* referee.

Adam Tinworth Score 7/10

VITAL INFO
A sourcebook for Warith: The Oblivion
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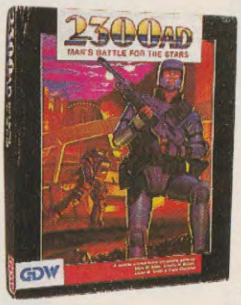
2300 AD

when was Traveller not just Traveller? when it became 2300 AD. Martin Glen looks back fondly at a sci-fi RPG set in a grungier, less techy world than its predecessor.



Designed by Marc Miller, Lester Smith, et al.
Published by GDW
First published 1986

In 1986, like a lot of other major games designers, GDW were looking for a bright new idea to complement their existing successes with *Traveller* and *Twilight 2000*.

What they came up with was *Traveller 2300*, an altogether grungier and sexier situation than the space opera of its more famous namesake.

The game was revised and reissued in 1988 under the title of *2300 AD*, presumably to allow us punters to tell it from the 'real' *Traveller*, and it gained a small but devoted following.

In the game setting, mankind has begun to expand out beyond the solar system, but the Earth is still a world of nation states, each of them scrabbling to build their own interstellar empire.

Various transglobal megacorporations grow in power and influence as they exploit the resources of these new worlds and the new markets growing between them. Alien races have been discovered on several worlds, and humanity knows it is not alone. And not all of the natives are friendly...

The system itself was the usual GDW mixture of the beautifully elegant and the hopelessly clunky. For example, a simple and effective task-resolution system ran things, much like that used in *Traveller* today, but an unnecessarily complex combat system, using lots of nasty decimal points was bolted on the side. But once you got used to it – and invested in a calculator – it was smooth enough, and certainly realistic.

World generation sacrificed simplicity for scientific accuracy, and after using it you probably could have landed a job with NASA.

Character creation revolved around career paths, much like *Traveller*, and one could choose if characters came from the frontier or the inner 'core' worlds of Earth and Alpha Centauri.

But, all the nitpicking attention to realism aside, the setting offered a multitude of opportunities. Players could explore strange new worlds and tame the frontier, get involved in the intrigue of the struggles between the new imperialistic powers, fly a cargo trader between the worlds of the French Arm or perform industrial espionage and double-dealing.

Background information was detailed and full of ideas, and was supported by some of the best supplements for any SF game.

The technology was of the 'day after tomorrow' variety – no antigravity or lightsabers and an FTL drive that could only take you to the next star if it was within seven light years. But there were more than enough hi-tech goodies to keep most players happy.

Again, in keeping with the 'hard' SF theme, the aliens in the game really were alien, with their own carefully thought-out rationales for being just the way they were.

Chief among them were Pentapods, friendly hive-mind creatures who had mastered biotechnology, and the rampaging Kafer, football hooligans for the galaxy. The Kafer thrived on violence and bloodshed, and unfortunately mankind had come to their notice. This gave the players plenty of opportunity to get involved in good old-fashioned 'bug hunts' – except, of course, the bugs shot back...

2300 AD was supported by a variety of add-ons, including *Star Cruiser*, a space-combat boardgame incorporating ship design rules, *Aurore Sourcebook* (a detailed description of the frontier worlds currently suffering the brunt of the Kafer advance,) *Colonial Atlas*, which did exactly what the title says, and added adventure hooks for the various worlds. There were a variety of other adventures and supplements, the quality of which was always high.

By 1992, however, support for the game by GDW appeared to have all but ceased. There could be many reasons for this, but lack of punter interest would be the most likely one. How did it hit that problem, though, when it had so much potential?

Personally, I think that it suffered the same flaws that eventually led to the poor sales of *Traveller*; a new era in RPGs and the collapse of GDW.

Like that game, the supplements released in latter times concentrated almost exclusively on military-based adventures, namely the Kafer war, at the expense of detailing the rest of the setting – particularly the 'Great Game' elements. This meant that if you wanted to do something other than join the army and shoot aliens, you weren't left with many options. I get the feeling that too many GDW designers were wargamers who also happened to play roleplaying games.

Another major nail in the coffin was the sudden appearance and meteoric success of a certain game from R. Talosarian Games that changed the face of SF RPGs in 1988.

2300 AD tried to compete by releasing a cyberpunk supplement and a few adventures, but they were uneasy bolt-on additions that didn't mesh with the established background of the game.

But basically, *2300 AD* was a game from a different age, a time when cyberpunk was not all the rage and well, dare I say it, space opera was kinda cool. It was a good game that didn't really work when it was mixed with cyberpunk.

Unable to compete, *2300 AD* faded into the background and died quietly.

Which is a shame, because it was a damn good game. In fact, I think I'll dust it off and remind my players of just how devious and downright nasty the French Secret Service used to be. Or shall I say, will be..

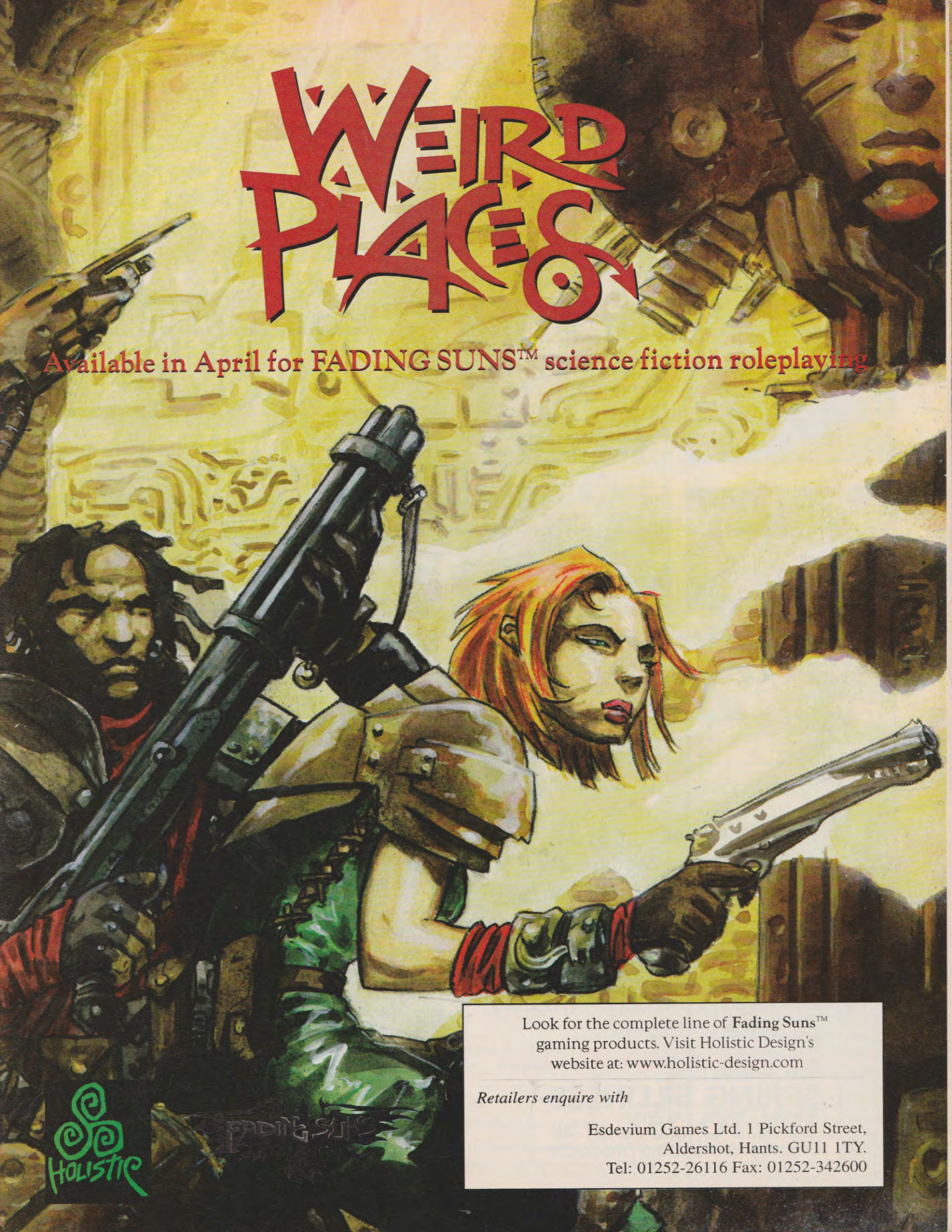
"The system itself was the usual GDW mixture of the elegant and the hopelessly clunky, but with a calculator it was smooth enough."

Imperium Games have suggested that the 2300 AD setting may feature as a possible sourcebook for Traveller 4th edition. Maybe we haven't seen the last of it yet..

2300 AD was set in the future of the Twilight 2000 post - nuclear war setting.

Worryingly for Eurosceptics, the most dominant nation on earth in 2300 is the French Empire!

Kafer were addicted to fighting; normally thick as two short planks, in combat their intelligence increased six-fold. Which meant they were one up on the average Millwall supporter.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James B

Christmas drill: turkey, boiled-to-death Brussels sprouts, figgy pud, feeling a bit ill, and the Bond movie on the box. But Jimmer B can be used for more than sending the olds to sleep, as Jim Swallow explains.

MAN WITH A GUN
"Stay right there, Bond. And don't make any sudden movements. If you do I shall maim you very painfully."
Colonel Sun

HARDWARE
"The shielded compartment in the overnight briefcase contained the Compact 9mm Browning fully loaded, and with two spare magazines. There was a small medical kit, which would not help them one iota against the venom of the water moccasin; a set of lock-picking tools, some assorted lengths of wire which could be used for several purposes, a vicious tool which could be used as a nine-inch lethal knife, or be transformed into a hacksaw, file or jemmy."
Scorpius

There can hardly be a single British gamer out there who hasn't seen the entire James Bond film library, thanks to endless re-runs every Bank Holiday.

As you read this, the newest 007 movie – *Tomorrow Never Dies* – is being shot around the world, and with the surge in interest around in espionage stories thanks to films like *The Saint* and *Mission Impossible*, thoughts might turn to a roleplaying frame of mind.

So why are there so few RPGs with a spy theme? Something of a poor relation in the roleplaying games field, there are only a handful of spy RPGs out there.

Only one is currently in print – Steve Jackson Games' *GURPS Espionage*, which incidentally has a supplemental scenario book, *GURPS Espionage Adventures*.

Bond himself had his own RPG with Victory Games' well-supported *James Bond 007* system, TSR produced two versions of *Top Secret S.I.* with several scenarios and sourcebooks, and Palladium had *Ninjas & Superspies*. Chameleon Eclectic's *Millenium's End*, while not strictly a 'spy' RPG, also falls in the group.

Of course, you can run espionage adventures in almost any milieu ("Good Morning Mr Phelps. The Orc you see before you is your target. This parchment will self-destruct in ten seconds...") but for the purposes of this article we'll concentrate only on present-day or near-future settings.

"The name's Bond; James Bond."

Using a plot from one of the Bond films that made it onto the silver screen is a bit of a non-starter, though. The chances that your players will know the plot and the twists from the start are very high. But there are a string of James Bond stories that are rather less well-known than the blockbuster movies.

Kingsley Amis (writing under the pseudonym Robert Markham) John Gardner and Raymond Benson all penned a plethora of Bond novels after Ian Fleming's death in 1964. These stories are much less well known than Fleming's works, but are still rich in usable material.

Gardner took the Sixties-era secret agent and brought him into the Eighties and later the Nineties, intact and still as suave as ever.

People and places

One major element present in the Bond stories is their use of contemporary 'props' – that is, story elements, locations and characters taken from the world at large. Recent Gardner books include *SeaFire*, whose villain is a media tycoon, perhaps modelled on Rupert Murdoch or Robert Maxwell, and *Cold*, where the foe is an American right-wing extremist militia group.

Both novels feature bad guys inspired by the news headlines of the day, in the same way that villains from the 1960's stories were either Chinese or Russian Communists, or else your typical megalomaniac. Back then the Red Peril was paramount and the Cold War was at full strength –

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LICENCE TO KILL
John Gardner
Novelisation of the Micheal G.

ond

it's only as you come closer to the present day that the foes change to become more contemporary enemies, like renegade corporations (Zorin Enterprises in *A View To A Kill*), the Russian Mafia (The Janus Syndicate in *Goldeneye*) or drug lords (Franz Sanchez in *Licence To Kill*).

Of course, if you still have a fondness for the Cold War you can always ape Tom Clancy's *The Hunt For Red October* and set your scenario a few years in the past. Gardner's Bond also finds himself up against terrorist groups and Neo-nazis, both unique adversaries that are products of the Seventies and Eighties.

A forward-thinking villain would be more like a terrorist, hidden (often in plain sight), swift, highly mobile and an altogether different kind of foe. In *Cold*, the Children Of the Last Days are spread across the USA in tiny cells, and it's only at a summit meeting for it's leaders that 007 is capable of getting a shot at them.

In *Scorpius*, ruthless arms merchant Vladimir Scorpius masquerades as the leader of a wholesome religious sect, and *SeaFire's* Sir Maxwell Tarn protects himself with a massive international corporate empire. Different times mean different enemies, and with a world picture changing daily, threats come from all corners of the globe.

Another important thematic 'prop' is the backdrop – the location for your story. While some places will work no matter when your scenario is set (The Pyramids are still as impressive now as they were in 1977's *The Spy Who Loved Me*), modern locales lend a kind of immediacy to scenarios – part of *Death Is Forever* takes place on the French TGV supertrain. The climax of *Never Send Flowers* occurs in the Disneyland Paris theme park, and the newest Bond novel, *Zero Minus Ten*, happens in Hong Kong on the eve of the colony's return to Chinese rule.

Running an espionage adventure about, say, an attack on the Channel Tunnel during the British general election would make the players feel 'closer' to the action than one about a missing spy-plane in Antarctica. Modern-day espionage roleplaying games have the best kind of source material – the news: just watch TV or read the papers. No matter where or who the mission concerns, it's important to maintain the mood.

Breaking the Mold

The traditional spy story comes in the 'mission' format, with the agents briefed on a task which starts the chain of events that lead to main plot, and the 007 movies have largely followed that same style.

But that doesn't mean that you have to as well. The referee can tag events to individual characters to break up repetitive plots.

Have players take a holiday only to spot a known KGB agent in the company of an MI6 officer at their hotel. This is a great way to put them off-balance and arouse their curiosity.

You can also expand the traditional spy story 'toolkit' by introducing agents and espionage 'players' from other quarters. The novel *Icebreaker* features agents from the UK's SIS & MI6, Israel's Mossad, America's CIA and Russia's KGB as well as the little-known Finnish SUPO. And what of groups like the BIR or NSA? Shin Beth? BfV? Syrian AFI?

Another angle is that of corporate spying and industrial espionage, something that's a permanent fixture of most cyberpunk RPGs. In Japan, it's rumoured that the larger corporate conglomerates have a better intelligence network than the government. So why shouldn't big business be ready to cheat, lie and kill to protect it's secrets and gather those of others?

As well as the idea of espionage agencies, there are those groups and organisations that operate on the fringes. Religious cults, terrorist groups, environmental extremists, all are examples of groups that have little or no loyalty to any one nation.

Licence to Steal

The John Gardner/Robert Markham/Raymond Benson James Bond stories are not as well known as the films and original Ian Fleming novels, so there's a fair opportunity to pillage them for scenario ideas.

We've already covered some of the essential elements of these books above, but beyond this there are still fifteen novels worth of storylines ready to be pilfered – just make sure that your players haven't read them beforehand.

Some of the plots can be placed into an ongoing campaign by swopping out key elements or NPCs. In *Special Services*, for example, Blofeld makes a reappearance, returned from the dead, almost. Replace Blofeld with your villain of choice and it can be James Bond 007's TAROT or Top Secret S.I.'s WEB behind the dirty deeds.

Other ideas like the 'hunter becomes hunted' plotlines of *Nobody Lives Forever* and *No Deals, Mr Bond* are classic scenario leads, turning the tables on agent PCs who might have become complacent in past missions.

Icebreaker, *SeaFire* and *Win Lose Or Die* are all good mixes of action set pieces while *Role Of Honour*, *Scorpius* and *Zero Minus Ten* have plenty of pacey intrigue and 'legwork' for players of a detective bent.

While the James Bond novels might lack the gritty realism of John le Carré or the technothriller aspects of Tom Clancy, they are nevertheless pitched to provide action and adventure for the reader and RPG referees. It may be just what your game needs.

MASTER PLAN

"To his rising horror and concern, Bond heard of the plans in large cities throughout the United States. The orders were already clean-cut and clear – the seizing of TV and radio stations; the securing of all National Guard armories, the neutralizing of law enforcement agencies and military bases. It was all standard coup d'etat procedure, played by the book, and he knew that, if there were enough people with allegiance to General Clay, the entire operation stood a definite chance of success."

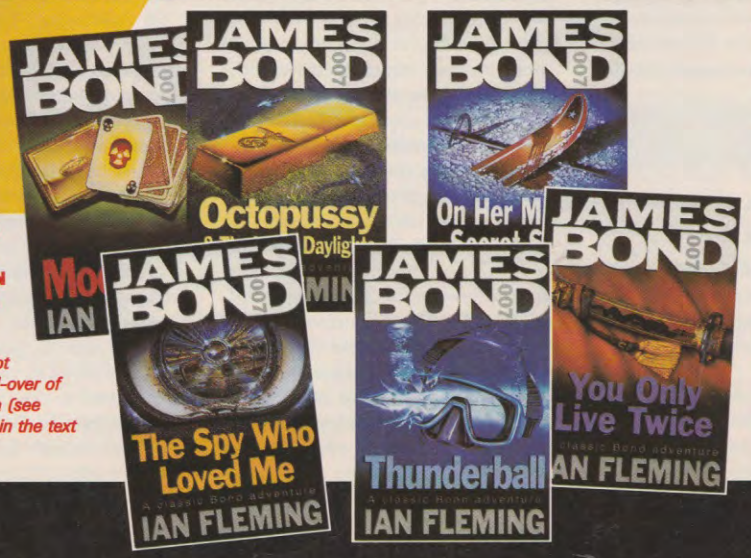
Cold

Any referee serious about running a spy RPG should check out *The Bluffer's Guide To Espionage*, from Ravette Books, ISBN 1-85304-156-4, while those living close to London should visit the excellent exhibit on Britain's spying history at the Imperial War Museum.

Wilson & Richard Maibaum movie script.

GOLDENEYE
John Gardner
ISBN 0-340-63537-1
Novelisation of the Michael France & Jeffrey Caine movie script.

ZERO MINUS TEN
Raymond Benson
ISBN 0-340-68448-8
Bond uncovers a plot amid the 1997 hand-over of Hong Kong to China (see 'People and places' in the text above).



BOND CLASSICS
(all by Ian Fleming, published by Hodder & Stoughton)

CASINO ROYALE **ISBN 0-340-42567-9**
DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER **ISBN 0-340-42564-4**
DR. NO **ISBN 0-340-41899-0**
FOR YOUR EYES ONLY **ISBN 0-340-42572-5**
FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE **ISBN 0-340-42562-8**
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LIVE AND LET DIE **ISBN 0-340-42570-9**
THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN GUN **ISBN 0-340-42571-7**
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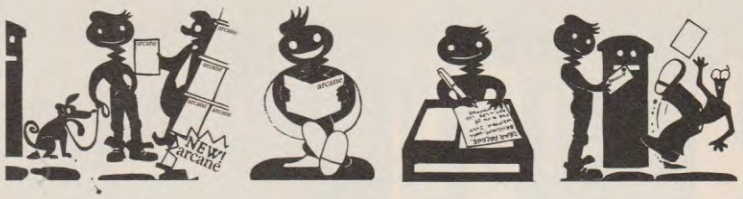
THE SPY WHO LOVED ME **ISBN 0-340-42569-5**
THUNDERBALL **ISBN 0-340-42561-X**
YOU ONLY LIVE TWICE **ISBN 0-340-42563-6**

arcane scribblings



Feedback. We love it. Even if it makes a nasty yowling noise that hurts our ears.

I want to kill, kill, kill

Please can I shoot Andrew Rilstone?

I admit that placing a disclaimer on his bigotistical rantings is legal protection but I have to draw the line at his claims to near omniscience at knowing what people should be doing in gaming in general.

Articles such as his are a wonderful venue for presenting stimulating ideas. I just feel he wastes his slot; which, given the chance, I would murder for; dictating the ills and foibles of staid styles, of unoriginal philosophies and of routine leading to stagnation.

People do not play games to keep Mr Rilstone happy and morally content, they are played for the enjoyment of the players and ref alike. Admittedly the majority of bad games are for the amusement of the referee alone but this is the basis for an article in itself. Constructive criticism wend your way here, dictatorial rhetoric stay at home!

Please make space for expanding viewpoint, which you do, and wheel Mr Rilstone back into the gaming Middle-Ages where all inflexible, opinionated and dictatorial minded people should reside.

Then, those with progressive and flexible interpretations of the games milieu can get on with the fun that is there to be discovered.

Chris Jones, London

Excellent! This vindicates Andrew's role completely. A columnist who doesn't get hate mail and fan mail in roughly equal amounts isn't doing his job. As the next reader evidently understands...

Rilstone rage

I'm mailing you just to say how good I think you are. There is only one problem: Andrew Rilstone. Is it just me, or is he deliberately setting out to write really controversial articles? I know they are good articles (I think they can be really funny), but some of them have really pissed people off. Is this his mission in life (at **arcane**), or is he doing it himself?

Or... could there be a massive conspiracy among the **arcane** establishment to stimulate debate among the readers, due a misread government cover-up in the '50s about UFOs? Who knows? Who cares? What I meant to say is: AR keep doing it, 'cos the resulting furore is very funny to see, as the weird and wonderful readers of **arcane** battle among themselves to see who can slag you off the most!

Judith Knight, e-mail

P.S Gnomeworld is really cool.

That's just it: any feedback is good feedback as far as opinion columns are concerned. They're there to make you think, to stimulate debate. If necessary with a pointy stick.

Andrew does just that, and so long as I keep getting letters about him – negative AND positive – he stays.

Rilstone – pure genius

Andrew Rilstone has done it again in issue 19. Another brilliant, thought-provoking article for ADULTS. I put you under orders now to ignore and refuse to print any spurious complaints you receive to this article *[ooops - Ed]*. I am a qualified bona fide child protection social worker well versed in how dangerous society can be, but what makes it more dangerous is lack of debate on sensitive moral topics. I could go on at length, but suffice to say, long may Andrew keep these issues high on players' agendas. We must realise the potential of our player characters' actions, but place them safely in the fantasy arena in which they belong.

Mark Alman, Milton Abbas

Grief Encounters

The Encounters Special Edition was okay but it was all things we'd seen before.

Wouldn't a set of all-new Encounters have been more worth the expense of a special edition? They could even be a set of Encounters linked into a mini-campaign to be slipped into a running campaign as a diversion from the main plot

Mark Langford, Beccles

Linking Encounters together makes it more difficult to slip them into your own campaign, which is why they've been stand-alone.

We have been talking about doing another Encounters booklet, taking one city and presenting it in three different time periods (historical/fantasy, contemporary, futuristic), with plots and scenario seeds for different genres. Stay tuned.

Encounter attack

Whose idea was the Encounters book with issue 18? The reason I ask is that I wrote a letter to you suggesting this on March 7th. This sounds a bit suspicious. Was it a genuine coincidence, or was it more idea copying like some people have accused Andrew Rilstone of?

Andrew Wedge, Lancashire

We-ell, it was first proposed at the tail end of 1996. The commission to Ken and Jo Walton to add the extra stuff that went into the booklet was posted by me on February 20th this year. So I'd have to say it's coincidence. That's magazine lead-times for you. We work weeks ahead.

Letter from America,

My name is Dana and I live in the USA. For the past couple of months me and my friend have been searching for your publication all over and it has not been around anywhere! What's going on? And now I see you've already put out the next issue and now that puts us two issues behind.

We unfortunately cannot afford your subscription rates due to the darn currency exchange and other economic reasons. We really would like to catch up on the last two issues and see **arcane** appear once again. I ask that you please do something about this matter soon, like making sure that they have been distributed properly to our city. As you can see we really love your magazine otherwise we wouldn't bother to write.

We just want the magazine. We hope you understand.

Dana, via email

The reason the subscription is high isn't the exchange rate. It's the fact that subscriber copies get sent airmail.

Magazines that are sold in US stores are always a couple of months behind because they get sent surface mail. It's cheap, but it's slow.

A painfully poor joke

The Book of Norse reminded me of an old story passed down through the Harvey generations:

Apparently, Haarold Harvey was raided by Vikings and one, Erik, demanded he surrender his new kitchen. (He was looting for his wife.)

Haarold, nimble as he was, jumped forward and hit him a heavy blow on the head jamming his helmet down over his eyes and effectively blinding him. He then put a bricklayers hod in his hand and sent him packing.

Ever since then, the Harveys have always known that a hod's as good as a sink to a blind Norse.

Chris Harvey

Card bored

I like *Magic: The Gathering, Mythos* and *Kult*. I go to EMAILE in Edinburgh every Monday. I buy CCG magazines but I also

communication

If you'd like to get in touch with **arcane** *there are several ways. The most traditional is to send us a letter clearly marked '***arcane** *scribblings' and addressed to* **arcane**, *30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. The slightly more technically advanced among you can send us a fax on (01225) 732252, while all you fully-fledged InfoCyberOtakuNauts out there can e-mail us at:*

arcane@futurenet.co.uk *or visit our Web site at:*

http://www.futurenet.co.uk/entertainment/arcane.html.

We look forward to hearing from you.

You gotta LARP

Letter Of The MONTH

Dear arcane,

You know what would be really cool? Live-Action Puppetland! The players bring a puppet and the ref makes a little painted backdrop! Also, you could have a lot of fun annoying tight-ass gothic LA Vampire players.

"Oh, I do Live Action, too."

"Yeah? Where's your costume?"

"Wuzzle's right here, aren't you, Wuzzle?" Then whip out pink canine hand puppet who nods vigorously. Just an idea.

Steven Darlington
University of Queensland

Might we suggest you wear a hat when out in that hot Queensland sun, Steven? (On a sort of related note, and this applies to you Steve, can anyone who ever wins anything from us write in with their address. In case we lose it. Er, which we do, occasionally. On account of being disorganised roleplayers, not obsessive desk tidiers.)

roleplay every week and so I buy roleplaying mags.

arcane is a very good roleplaying mag but unfortunately, its not a very good CCG mag. I realise that because of your recent survey you want to put some *Magic* related items in but I'm sure that if you asked an average group of *Magic* players they would tell you that having a few features on CCGs won't make them buy the mag. I don't really mind a bit of *Magic* in the mag but I think that the four or five pages that it's been getting in the last few issues is excessive.

You might come back with the standard '*Magic* is a major force in the games world' retort but the only argument I'll accept is that if you don't cover *Magic* you'll lose money through lost sales. 'Cause I really don't want to see **arcane** go down the tubes.

John Gavin Lighterness, via email

The regular Magic coverage is three pages. It's there because we think you want to read it. There's no hidden agenda. If everyone hated it – which they clearly don't – we'd drop it.

More metal

I was very interested to see the letter in issue 19 from Mark Jarvis about the lack of miniatures coverage anymore in the magazine. I was first drawn into the hobby many years ago by *D&D* and part of that attraction was the wonderful miniatures available – grotesque and fantastical 'toy soldiers'. I progressed onto many different games (*RuneQuest, Dragon Quest, Powers & Perils, Traveller, AD&D*) yet I kept collecting the figures and my painting skills improved.

I seemed to be the person who always provided the figures for our gaming group, and despite my buying a box of figures from Citadel each month we still ended up using counters half the time. There seemed to be something very important in those days of using the miniatures to represent our small party of adventures and the opponents they invariably ended up fighting. Moving the pieces around on the table made your character feel more real.

Sometime in the last 5 years (by my own experience) this changed. I stopped buying figures, and both I and others I played with stopped using them. I think it was a result of games becoming less combat orientated and more story based. But there is still a big gap left – I feel a very strong need for props to aid visualisation. I used to love miniatures for the detail they had and how they helped me see into the fantasy or futuristic worlds. All too often art in RPG's is scarce or of a low quality and miniatures helped to fill this gap.

I still want to see what the monsters and characters in a game look like – maybe this is where computers will take the place of traditional miniature in the future – I can see them being used in tactical simulations, and also to provide 3D models of characters that can be examined and manipulated.

As a footnote to the above, I recently went to Salute 97 in London, a large wargames fair. I had never been to an event of this kind before (being a roleplayer not a wargamer) and was very surprised by the sheer scale of the event. There must have been hundreds in attendance spanning several large halls and smaller rooms. There were also a great many trade stands from different miniature manufacturers, all in all telling me that the miniatures market was far bigger and healthier than I'd even expected.

Maybe we are in for a revival – but I think that the magazine should definitely bring back coverage of this side of the RPG hobby. Companies I'd like to see featured are Ral Partha, RAFM, Reaper and Colonial Miniatures.

Andrew Cunnington, by email

My experience with miniatures was much the same – collecting them, then no longer using them.

I'm happy to include miniatures, but what I don't want to do with them is just have reviews that say 'this orc has a bit too much flash on, this one's very nice' etc.

I've had a couple of suggestions, but as I'm not a big miniatures buff I'd be happy to hear any more.

Nice one

I thought that the free RPG included on the cover [of **arcane** 19] was very good and consequently surfed the web for more info. More free RPGs of this quality would certainly be welcomed and make me renew my subscription

The article about incorporating magic was also very useful – gave me some thoughts for my MERP campaigns.

Two grinds though:

I don't want to sound like a nitpicker or anything, but is there anything better that could be put in place of the USS Bozeman saga? Its just waffle and wastes space.

Bring back miniatures. I first subscribed when you covered miniatures and it was one of the reasons i subscribed.

Retro on *WFRPG* was very interesting too. Thanks for a great mag. I look forward to Arc20

Steve Rich, by email

PS: I was reading *WD91* the other day and whose name was on the letters page? – none other than your own Paul Pettengale talking about how much he loved the mag etc! Hey does this warrant some freebies for observation or what!

How about a hearty 'well done, that man' and a metaphorical pat on the back.

USS Bozeman isn't something I'd thought much about. We DO get people writing in for it, and it doesn't take up much space.

Miniatures are kind of in the magazine's pending file right now.

Thanks for your comments on Retro – which I wrote. I should point out that the first paragraph says WFRPG was Games Workshop's first RPG. It wasn't, of course. Judge Dredd and Golden Heroes both preceded it. I even bought Golden Heroes when it came out... The problem with being an editor is that you rarely spot your own mistakes.

Gnome World

Having collected every copy of **arcane** so far I feel that I must just say that I think that you should keep Gnome World. As an intermitent reader of *Dragon* the cartoons are the first thing I turn to and would miss them.

I also must congratulate you on the general content of the mag I especially enjoyed the *Forgotten Futures* give away As I was about to start a *Space 1889* game it was a godsend.

David@moglwi, via email

The cartoon at the back is staying, though the current run of Dai Hard is coming to an end pretty soon. We're working on a replacement.

arcane shorts

Take a look at our shorts.

Does anyone know if Laurence Schick has published a second edition of *Heroic Worlds?*. It's an amazing book which details every roleplaying product ever published but is only complete up to the end of 1990.

Nick Smith, East Grinstead

Are there any sites on the internet for *Judge Dredd* RPG users, as so far I have not found one adventure, rule or even mention of it. I knew not many people played it but I thought more than what it seems did.

Gavin Meaking

Um. Probably. Try visiting Lycos and typing in 'Judge', 'Dredd' and 'RPG'.

Only yesterday I was learning how to play *M:TG* and we invented a blue card named 'Call of Nature' showing a distressed goblin and causing the target creature to tap for two turns. I hope you like it and maybe you could pass it on to Wizards of the Coast.

Andrew Spragg, Caterham

Since you do card combos and deck construction advice for *Magic*, could you please do the same for *Netrunner?*

Alan Wilkinson, Beaconsfield

Card combos, for any game, aren't something we'll be doing a lot of in future.

How about printing a short story between each comic story?

David Dorward, via email

I'd like us to agree that it doesn't matter what other people say. Could we do that?

Lee Thompson, Wellingborough

Take a look at Soapbox this issue.

I like the online review index. Of course, I'd love to have one in print, too. Any chance?

Eyal Teler, Jerusalem

What about this latest **arcane** horror thing? I actually thought this was quite cool. It talks as if describing *CoC;* using 'Keeper' for 'ref' and things. Could be an indicator of more system based stuff. Hope so.

Matt R, via email

free reader ads

With spring in full bloom, lots of gamers emerge from their caves this month.

RPGs

● **arcane** issue 1 for sale or swap for *CoC* supplements. Offers? Phone Dan Taylor on 01454 412087

● **arcane** mags issues 4-18. Offers? Also *AD&D* clearout. Send SSAE for lists: DM Whitfield, 13 Winchester Rd, Portsmouth, Hants PO2 7PS

We can sell you the mags, too; see page 47. Except we haven't got any issue 9s left. Nor maybe 15s by the time you read this.

● *AD&D* rulebooks; *Player's Handbook, DM's Handbook* and *Monstrous Manual*. All for £35 ono. Nick Lang 01752 851793

● 20-year RPG collection: Dragon 1-220, White Dwarf 1-180, over 300 items for *D&D*, 50 Judges Guild, over 10,000 figures. Many other items. Chris Bunyan 01777 706806

Have you gone completely mad, Chris?

● *Cyberpunk, AD&D, Battletech* + many miniatures. For complete list, send SSAE to John Spashett, 190 Ladysmith Road, Enfield

● *MERP* most campaign and scenario books - £60 or near offer. Will split. David Drage 01224 573264

● *Tunnels & Trolls* 5th edition boxed + two dungeons - £5. *Wizard's Quest* (Avalon Hill) - £10. *Warhammer Horned Rat* CD ROM - £20. John Calver 01454 324364

● *Vampire, Werewolf* sourcebooks, rulebooks, etc. All in good condition. Matt Scott 01705 696477 for prices

● For sale: *Dragon Warriors* 3 & 4 and various *Fighting Fantasy* books including single player and multi-player. David Dorward 0118 976 0293 for more details

● Wanted: 1st edition rulebook, *Street Samurai* catalogue. Brucey, 18 Albert Street, Newton Stewart, Wigtownshire DG8 6EJ

● Wanted: *Battletech* 3rd edition rulebook from the boxed set. Just the rulebook though. Matt 01332 792864 matt.lewis@usa.net

● Wanted: *Star Wars* RPG as recent an edition as possible. Also supplements, modules, etc. Must be in VGC. Neil Macray 01786 815865

CCGs

● 2,500+ *Magic* cards: *Antiquities, Legends, Dark*, excellent condition – £300. Contact Stuart Clayton 01536 390079 evenings

● *M:TG Revised*, singles. For list send SAE to Karl Goldsmith, 42 Harwood Avenue, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2LY

● *Magic:TG* complete sets: *Revised* – £220, *Dark* – £120, *Fallen Empires* – £50, *Chronicles* – £50. All near mint. James Howe 01670 518706 evenings

This is the twit who didn't leave his name last time. He's got it together now, though. He says.

● *Magic, Jyhad, Star Trek* CCGs. Bargains galore. All must go. Contact David Drage 01224 573264

● *Magic, Mythos, Jyhad:* disillusioned player retiring. Selling cards off at excellent prices. Jason Cooke 01703 639645

Are you quite sure, Jason? You'll never be able to replace them when you come to your senses and change your mind, you know.

● *M:TG* rares and uncommons wanted from all sets. Reasonable prices paid. Please mail your list to David Harris, 28 St John's Road, Aspull, near Wigan

● Type I and Type II *Magic* cards for sale or trade. Includes lots of OOP. Graham Theobalds 01703 443060 for details

● *Spellfire* chase/photo cards wanted to buy or trade; reasonable prices paid. Phone Seán Liam Cook 0171 370 5586

● *ST:TNG* cards + *Echelons of Fury* for sale or will swap for *Magic*. Paul Rosen, 5 Field House Drive, Oxford OX2 7NT. Going cheap!

● *Star Wars* CCG – £300, *New Hope* – £150, *Hoth* – £150. All complete, mint card sets in folder. Pat Eadie 01705 501200

● Steve's Card Exchange. *Magic* for sale or trade. Steve Pashley of Burnham on Crouch, Essex CM0 8BQ. 01621 784515

wargames

● *Necromunda* w/miniatures and *Warhammer 40K* Tyranid miniatures for sale. Offers e-mail: paul.harris1@virgin.net

● *Warhammer* goblin core army, 1,000 points + army book, unpainted – £40. New *Warhammer* miniatures: lizardmen or bretonians – £15 each set or £25 together. Jon Murphy 01202 398293

● Fantasy figure painting service specialising in orcs, goblins, dwarves and elves from £1.25 each. Enquiries with SAE to Darryl James Boulton, 8 Fox Street, Sunderland SR2 7NF

● *WH40K* 1st edition. *Warhammer* and *WH40K* novels. Graham Warr 01604 713061 week day evenings

● *WHFB* dwarf army, unpainted. 100 models – £50. Dan Tomlinson, 6 School Lane, Roby Mill, Wigan, Lancs WN8 0QR

● *Warhammer* + loads of extras – £70. *Dragon Dice:* 4 kicker packs and *MageStorm* boxed – £25. 01639 882611

● *Warhammer* boxed set and *Chaos* supplements. 8,000 point army + 15 issues of **arcane**, 20 issues of *White Dwarf*. Sensible offers. Alec Richardson 01235 762634

live action

● Myth LRP: Hampshire's biggest LRP club requires new players and monsters to adventure in Napoleonic forts. Pat Eadie, 37 Whiteacres Close, Gosport, Hants PO12 4XD 01705 501200

● Clothe your character. Enhance your entity. Dress to impress with Phantasy Dress. Sharon Windmill (aka Phantasy) 01322 613554

play-by-mail

● Free turns in fantasy PBM. Send details to Rhys Perkins, 85 Nelson Avenue, Minster Sheppey, Kent ME12 3SF

fanzines

● *Star Wars* fanzine – The Jawa Melting Pot 1 on sale. Send cheque/po for £2.70 to John Greenhalgh, 1 Masefield Avenue, Radcliffe, Manchester, Lancs M26 3GZ or leave answerphone message on 0161 723 0039

● Visions: the ultimate sci-fi/fantasy fanzine. Issue 1 only £1 + SSAE. David House, 8 Eythrope Rd, Stone, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP17 8PG

Described as 'pretty darn good' in our Fanzine Update, **arcane** *12.*

contacts

● Experienced roleplayer (32) looking for game in Aberdeen area. *Cthulhu* or any. Will GM. David Drage 01224 573264

● Gamer looking for group in Preston area during the summer from July onwards. Please contact before July. Stephen Nicoll, 17/8 Hillside Halls, Dalrymple Street, Dundee DD2 2LR m96san@river.tay.ac.uk

● Novice roleplayer (20) seeks players in Rutland area. Fantasy/sci-fi/. Robin Jeffries 01572 724019 RobinJuk@aol.com

● Novice gameplayer (male, 16) looking for introduction to fantasy/horror RPG society – Cumbernauld/Kilsyth/Kirkintilloch area. Chris Conway 01236 824794

● *Magic* players required for *Magic* ladder (like squash) to operate in North/Central London. Send SAE for details to Chris Jones, 52 Avenue Road, London N12 8PY

● Seeking *Magic* players in Bolton area. 18+ preferred. Jonathan or Andy on 01204 700413

● Wanted: experienced *Magic* players in the Southampton area to test decks for Type II tournaments. Anyone interested in forming a club also phone Graham on 01703 443060.

● Wanted: new ~~victims~~ players of *M:TG* in Carlisle and surrounding areas (19). Tony Black 016977 3521

We don't think there is anyone in the area surrounding Carlisle.

● Wanted: contacts in S Cambs. Looking for

Please place my free ad under the following heading:

- ☐ roleplaying games
- ☐ card games
- ☐ wargames
- ☐ live-action roleplay
- ☐ play-by-mail
- ☐ fanzines
- ☐ contacts
- ☐ messages
- ☐ clubs & societies

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game to join/start and/or *ME:TW* traders/players. David Bell 01763 245651 evenings

● New York's finest seeks Dundee group. *WoD/Shadowrun/Cthulhu/Traveller/AD&D.* Rick Evans (23) 01382 665310

● Welwyn area player/GM looking to join or form group. Most games considered. Derek Johnston 01707 394192

Look no further than the next ad.

● New society invites you to play *Vampire Masquerade* on 24th May 1997 in Welwyn Garden City. Also looking for people in Herts/Beds area for new roleplay society. Joanna Toomey 01707 335430

Synchronicity is a beautiful thing, isn't it?

messages

● The fish is behind you. The fish is hungry. Very hungry – Fred the Flying Walrus.

It's all right for Fred; he can fly away.

● Dear Tanis, Moldano the Barbarian shall return! Via the back door, to Castle Giland. Ha Ha Ha, burp!

At around 11.30 on Friday night, we expect...

● My Lady Guinevere, I come from the future to rescue you from Camelot. I beg of you, do not remain hidden from me – First Knight of the Order of the Black Crusade

Have you ever actually pulled with this routine?

USS Bozeman

In which Mr Scattergun returns, again (as he is very welcome to do, as is Captain No'Face – provided he can blag a new ship). But first, Sherbert Hues has miraculously survived whatever it was that threatened to destroy her. We're not really sure what she's on about, but it sounds absolutely awful.

● ISS Eris to Imperial Legate Melnibon: this independent ship recognises no outdated, oppressive, imperialist power – Captain Sherbert Hues

Empiricist doctrines? Pah! Sherbert Hues, space witch extraordinaire, is more than a match for any unparsimonious theories of perception.

● ISS Eris intercom to bridge: spear of Tuatha claims victim. Warcruiser Hunter destroyed. Spear safely regained.

See? Spear and all. John Locke? Nowhere.

● Picard to Bateson: have transporter lock on snotling and weresheep. Beaming them into space now. Engage!

Right. That's the baa-ck of those weresheep, unless they decide to 'ram' any of your ships.

● Picard to Engineering: arm phasers and photon torpedoes. Fire at ISS Eris now! Raise shields now!.

That's not like Jean-Luc. What is going on aboard the Enterprise? Nothing wrong we hope.

● Transmission delay noted. Charge Technobazooka. If that weapons illiterate prat from **arcane** magazine mentions scatterguns again, throttle him. He's with the Bozeman crew. Quantum torpedoes, armed for anti-ship. NARC homing pods on-line. Target Hellbringer. Fire! And where's that tribbleburger?

So perhaps you'd like to tell us all exactly what a 'quantum torpedo' is. Or a 'technobazooka' for that matter. You're making it all up, aren't you? Still, that's a nasty hole in the hull of the Hellbringer whatever it was that made it.

clubs and societies

There are lots of abbreviations here now to save space. You can work them out.

● **Barnsley TCG & RPG Club** Tues: 6-10.30pm @ Barnsley Methodist Church, Pitt St, Barnsley, S. Yorks. "Still going strong. New members welcome." *01226 205595*

● **Bath RP Club** Suns: 11.30-5pm. "No fees. Needs new players (18+)." *Neal 01225 463631*

● **Battlezone**, Fris: 5pm+ @ 58 Boutport St, Barnstaple, Devon. *Pete Ashman 01271 321344*

● **Black Country RPS** Thurs: 7.30pm+ @ Blackheath Coronation Social Club, Park St, Rowley Regis, W Mids. "All ages and games – 70p a night." *Steve Turner 01384 235244*

● **Blind to Reality** Suns: 7-10pm. Horror, *AD&D, BloodBowl, WH40K.* "Small Gosport club." *Alec Phillips 01705 526080*

● **Bognor Regis RPG Club** Weds: 8-12pm. Sci-fi, fantasy, conspiracy, free form. No fees. *Baxter 0976 723366*

● **Bournemouth Beserkers** Fris: 7-10pm + twice a month on Suns. "Still in Bournemouth." *Andrew Mussell 01202 481668*

● formerly **Bournemouth Beserkers** Fris: 7-9pm @ 32 Ellingham Avenue, March, Cambs. *Chris or Debbie 01354 657713*

● **Bradford Games Club** Suns: 11.30-6.30pm @ Gingerbread Centre, Darley Street, Bradford Centre. "All Workshop games, some others. £1 for room rent."

● **Brighton** "Any system. Playing *D&D* at the moment." And *Conspiracy X.* *Ric 01273 683400*

● **Bristol LRP Society** Meet Fris: 8pm @ back room of the Assize Courts pub, Bristol. "Monthly fantasy LRPs out and indoors, rich gameworld, comprehensive rules. Also *Renewal, Gathering,* etc. Old timers and virgins welcome." *Ciaran 0117 974 1863* *Andy 0117 970 6651* *Dave the Hobbit 0117 907 9195*

● **Bromsgrove Roleplayers** Weds: 7-10pm @ The Burcot Room, The Council House, Burcot Lane, Bromsgrove. *Pete 01905 354717* *Dave 01527 875789*

● **Covenant of Salop** Sats: 10.30-4pm. St Peter's Parish Hall, Ludlow, Shropshire. *Gareth 01584 872980*

● **Croxley Roleplayers** "Most Sundays at my home. Play cyberpunk and sci-fi genres mostly." *Mr NI Clubb 01923 778379*

● **Croydon Roll & Play** Thurs: 7pm+ @ The Dog & Bull, Surrey St Market, Croydon. *Dave 0181 660 3032*

● **Curious Pastimes** LRP event organiser (Renewal). Details of this year's events from 168a Hoylake Rd, Moreton, Wirral L46 8TQ 01933 226893 jim@curious.u-net.com

● **Doncaster Wargamers & Roleplayers Club**. Weds: 1900-2130 @ Elmfield House, South Parade, Doncaster. "RPGs, CCGs, CDGs, boardgames, miniatures. Historical, fantasy, sci-fi, Games Workshop. Under 16s – £1, over 16s – £2." *01302 881346*

● **Dragons on the Hill** Weds: 6-11pm. (18+) King of Diamonds, Leather Lane, EC1. *Mark Shorey 0181 560 3160*

● **East Kilbride GC** "Speak fish man!" *John 01355 260601*

● **East Midlands RPGA/Harlequins GC** Suns: 1.45-6pm @ 2nd Arnold (St Mary's) Scout HQ, Atherley House, Calverton Rd, Arnold, Nottingham. *Simon Stoppard 0115 921 5533* *John Harris 0115 939 4185* sara@theleys.demon.co.uk

● **Elemental Lords** Every three weeks, Worcester. *Paul Baker 01905 428386* d.foxall-reilly@worc.ac.uk

● **Finchley GC** Thurs: 6.30-10.30pm @ Old Finchleians Sports Club, Woodside Park. *Seren 0181 202 3856*

● **Glasgow South** *AD&D* club starting. Limited places. Write for more info to Martyn Smith, 58 Nithsdale Street, Strathbungo, Glasgow G41 2PY *Martyn 0141 423 3289*

● **Glasgow University GS** Tues: (term time only) 5.30-9pm @ Qudos – Queen Margaret Union, University Gardens. All welcome. *0141 337 6768* thomja@sdcs.gla.ac.uk http://www.gla.ac.uk/Clubs/Gaming/

● **Grimsby WGC** Mons/Thurs. Wargames, boardgames and cardgames (no FRPs). 14+ only. *Tim Walker 01472 348953*

● **Guild of Mêlée and Magic** Central: (Mons: RPGs, Tues: CCGs) Jason 0181 715 8675. West (Sats: RPGs/CCGs) Gerald 0181 991 1297. East (Thurs: RPGs/CCGs) Mel 0181 595 3467. South (Suns: RPGs/CCGs) now @ The Black Horse & Harrow, 167 Rushey Green, Catford SE6 4BD Jon 0181 699 8100. "First visit free with a copy of **arcane**, annual membership £5."

● **Islington** weekends. *M:TG,* roleplaying, GW boardgames. *Simon 0171 226 7724*

● **KGB** Every day of the week except Fris @ The Robert Gordon University RPG, LRP, CCG & wargames club. "All games covered, extensive games library. *Vampire Live* every 2nd Sat." *Nathan 01224 584590, Union 01224 262262.* mr.whippy@rsc.co.uk www.mr-whippy.net/KGB

● **Liverpool WGA** Thurs: 5.30-9pm, Sats/Suns: 2-7pm @ 43 Renshaw St, Liverpool. "All ages. RPGs also." *Jim 0151 428 1076*

● **Manticore GC** Thurs: 7.30pm @ Old Bell, Hemel Hempstead. Cards, boardgames, RPGs. *Steve 0181 903 5446*

● **Minotaur's Head RPS** North London. RPGs, CCGs, wargames, freeform. *Steve 0181 482 5568*

● **Omega** 2nd and 4th Suns: 10-5pm. (18+) "Seeking experienced roleplayers." *Paul 0161 344 1066* knight.errant@dial.pipex.com http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/plaza/ran54/omega.htm

● **Pembrokeshire GC** Weds: 6-9pm @ Community Education Centre, Haverfordwest. *Magic, AD&D, Vampire, Necromunda.* *Adam 01437 762633*

● **Redcar Adventurers Roleplaying Games Club** Fris: 6-9pm @ Redcar Library. *John 01287 642523*

● **Renegade RPC** in Ilford will be starting again soon at the Havelock. *Mark or Allison 0181 514 8189* (7pm+)

● **Ring of Mages** *M:TG* club. *Jamie 01888 544880*

● **Roleplayers of Chester** Weds: 7.30pm+ @ Chester Rail Club, Hoole. *Greg 01606 883698* *Allison 0151 200 6945*

● **Rugby Players' Guild** Mons: 7.30-11pm. Players and GMs (18+) welcome. *Bill 01788 334165* *Keary 01788 334941*

● **SASRA RP&WGC** Thurs: 7.30pm @ Summergrove Hotel, Hensingham. "Wide range of RPGs, LRPs and CCGs." *John 01946 590114* *Ray 01946 861204*

● **Shattered Reality RPC** "Looking for new members and GMs." Hallglen, Falkirk. *Andrew McVicar 01324 714214*

● **Spartan Circle Club** Suns: 6.30-10.30pm @ St Laurence's Centre, Northfield, Birmingham. *Paul Rickards 0121 415 4722*

● **Stamford Adventure Society** Mons/Weds: 8-11pm @ RAF Association, St Pauls Street, Stamford, Lincs. Roleplay and wargames. Players and GMs (16+)

● **Stockport Goblin Horde RP Club** Weds: 7pm. *AD&D, WFRP, Shadowrun,* etc. *Rachel 0161 456 1444*

● **The AARRGH! Thunk! RPG, Bedford** requires more loonies (18+). *WoD* and other strangeness/malarkey. *Woody 01234 341125*

● **The Albion Guard GC** Mons/Tues @ The Plough, Dog's Head St, Ipswich. *Keith 01473 289560*

● **The Orc's Armpit** Second Wed every month @ Hobson's Choice, Banbury. *Magic, Trek* CCGs. *Earthdawn, Warhammer* RPGs.

● **Wandsworth RPG** Mons: 7.30pm @ 57a Heathfield Road, Wandsworth. *Dave 0171 738 1807*

● **Welwyn Garden City** Live Action in Herts/Beds (14+). *Mind Theatre* books of *Vampire* and *Werewolf.* Jo 01707 335430

● **West London CGs** Weds @ The Castle, Acton. *Magic, Star Wars,* etc. *John 0171 573 1753* (days) *0181 993 4439* (eves)

● **Windsor RPGC** Tues: 7.30-11pm @ The Three Elms, junction of Clarence Rd and Hatch Lane, Windsor. (18+) Games rotate on 6-8 week cycle. *Andy 01753 573394* (evenings)

● **Worlds Apart Roleplayers** Tues: 6.30-11pm @ Wartling Rd Hall, Eastbourne. *Geoff 01323 646907*

THE HEIST OF THE CENTURY IS GOING DOWN AT LORD DELORIEN'S CASTLE IN GNOMEDIA. AND ONLY A COCKY HOBBIT SCRAMBLING UP A SEWAGE OUTFALL PIPE CAN STOP IT ...
Gnome World
DAI HARD
A TALE FROM GNOME WORLD PART SIX
WRITERS: DAN ABNETT AND ANDY LANNING
ARTIST: ANDREW CURRIE
UP ON THE TOWER ROOF ...
HURRY IT ALONG! LOAD THE LOOT INTO THE BALLOON'S GONDOLA ...
... WHILE I MAKE SURE THIS LAMP COVERS OUR ESCAPE!
INTO THE DRAINPIPES YOU GO!
COME ON, NAZ! WE'RE SET TO CAST OFF!
WUZZAT? A FALLING LAMP?
FAREWELL, CASTLE DELORIEN! YOU'VE BEEN MOST GENEROUS!
AND WHEN THAT LAMP-FLAME HITS THE SEWER GASES AT THE BOTTOM OF THE OUTFALL PIPE ...
WHOOOMMFF!
"... IT REALLY WILL BE FAREWELL!"
NEXT: DAI THE DEATH!

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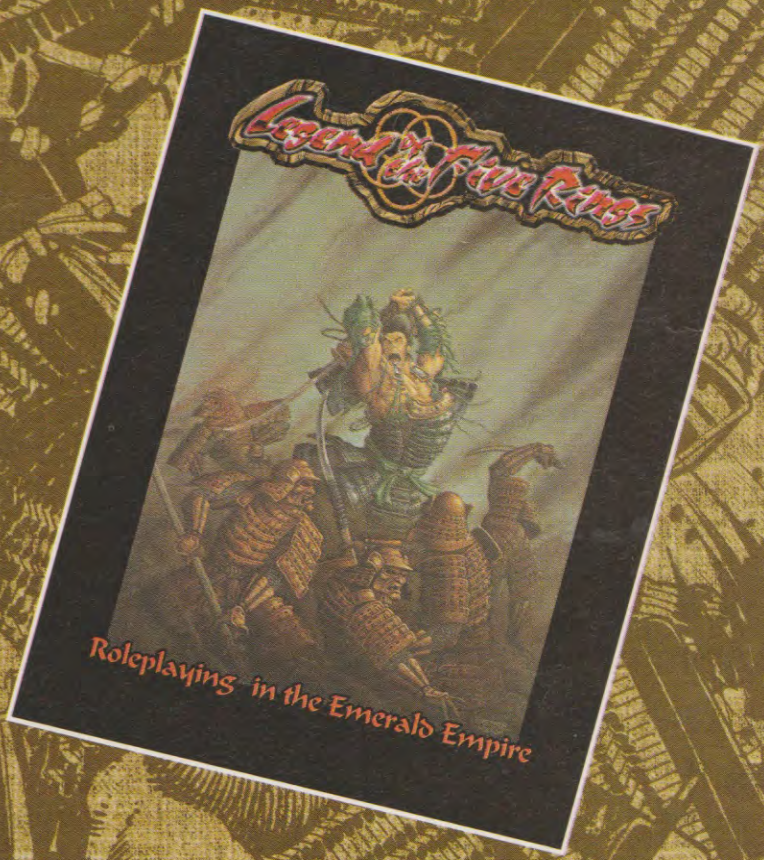

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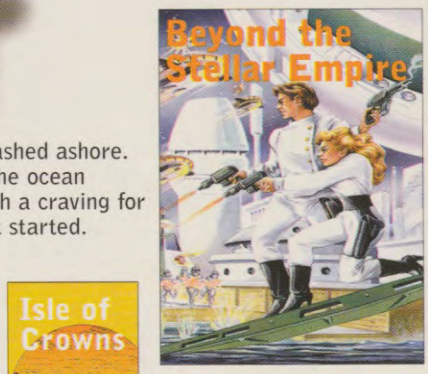

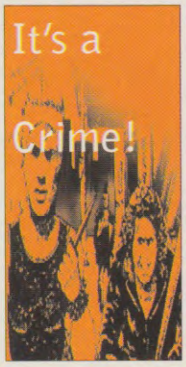

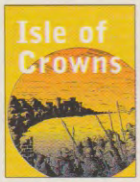

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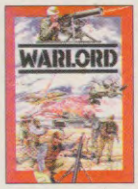

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